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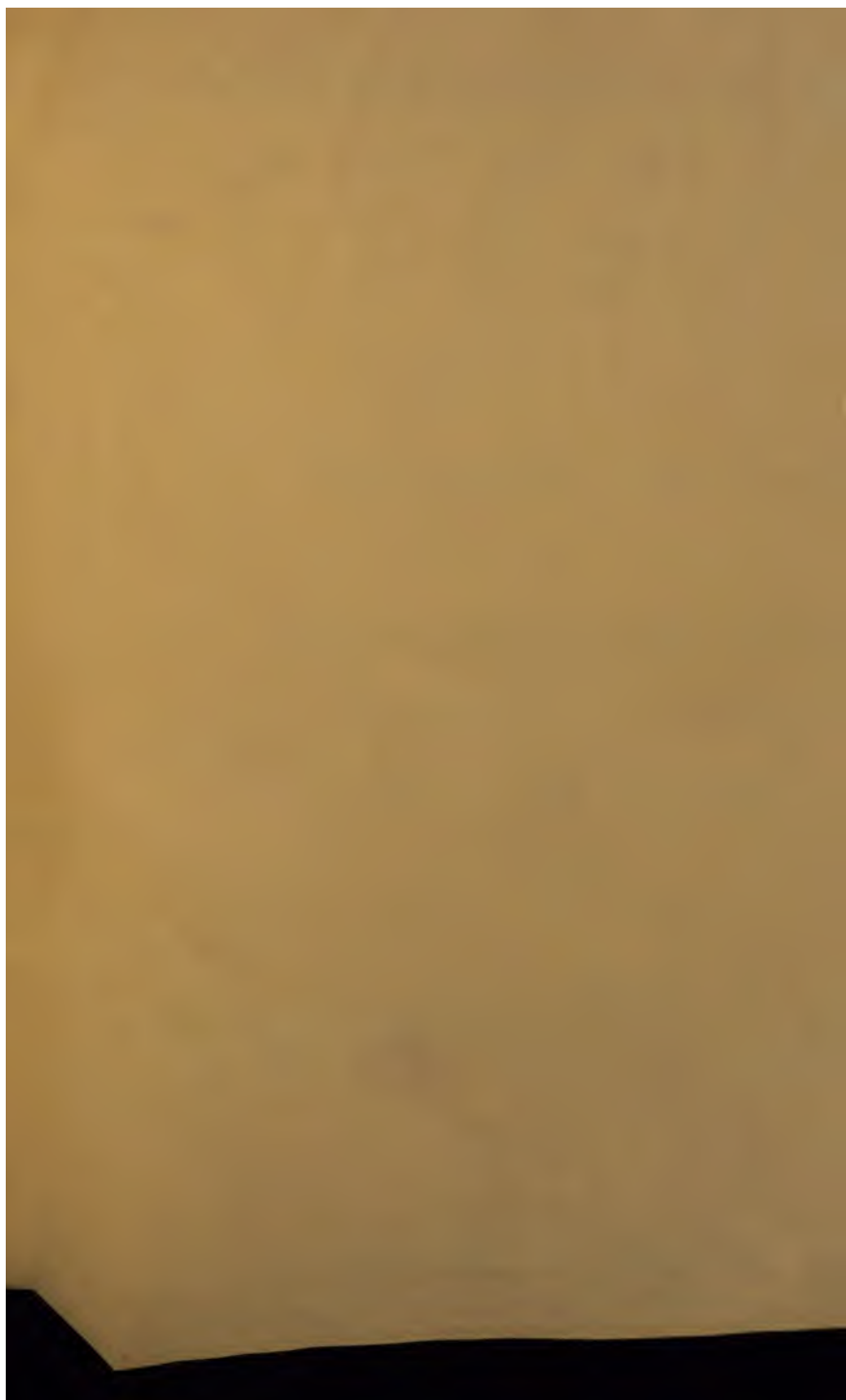


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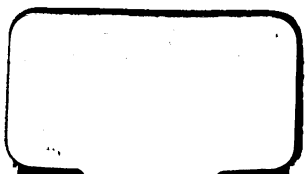


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CARSTONE RECTORY.

A STORY.

BY

GEORGE GRAHAM.

"The world's infections; few bring back at eve,
[Immaculate, the morners of the morn."—YOUNG.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1860.

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249. v. 490.



JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.

CARSTONE RECTORY.

CHAPTER I.

"I would I knew his mind."

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

It would be difficult to find a man more easy and comfortable in every way than the Rev. James Cavendish Bromley, Rector of Carstone, Somerset.

Life had been to him as a smooth, well-made, even road, along which he had been calmly and quietly driven. He had passed

through his school and college trials easily— if without distinction, certainly without discredit. Just at the proper age he had taken orders, and early in life had been presented to Carstone—a living worth eight hundred a year, with a very good parsonage, in excellent repair, and a population too small to overwork the bodily or mental energies of its pastor. At the time our story commences Mr Bromley had been Rector of Carstone for upwards of thirty years. Whether the placid course of his existence had ever been disturbed by a storm of disappointed affection no one could tell; so that those who like to find a reason for every thing could give none to account for the fact of a man remaining a bachelor, who had so long enjoyed circumstances which would enable him to marry. A bachelor, however, Mr Bromley continued, and an extremely contented one, to all appearance, he certainly was; judging from his sleek, fat carriage horses, his conservatory, well-kept garden,

and well-served table, it would be supposed that he spends upon himself the income of his living—as well as of certain stock which report gives him in the funds. This he thinks he has a right to do, for in action and in feeling he is an egotist, though by far too well-bred to appear one in conversation. In all matters of worldly prudence he has a good clear judgment, and to those who seek his advice he gives it in a satisfactory, judicious manner; but his opinions, though plainly stated, are never urged upon any one. Mr Bromley is a tall, well-made man, of a portly appearance, with a remarkably good complexion; hands and feet that look very small for his size, and hair of a delicate brown, fine, and rather scanty, but showing few marks of age. People who take life as easily as he does generally wear well, and that he does so would be the opinion of any one who could take a view of him, as we fancy we now do, seated in the most comfortable of easy chairs,



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had anticipated had been brought before him. "I thought," he said, after they had both been silent for a little while, "that women were seldom mistaken on such a point as this. Do you really think that Mr Mordaunt has serious intentions, and, so thinking, are you at a loss as to their object?"

"Yes, James, such is the case; though I confess that it must seem to you rather ridiculous for me to fancy that a man, with such a lovely creature as Flora constantly before his eyes, could spare a thought for any other girl. Why, Eleanor is not to be named in the same day with her."

"Then, it appears, you have settled the question," returned Mr Bromley, with the same twinkle again in his eye. "Mordaunt, you say, is seriously thinking of Flora; I heartily congratulate you, for I don't know a young man more desirable in every way."

"Now, James, you know very well that I have not said anything of the sort," said the

lady impatiently, "and it is impossible that I could say so, for he is so shilly-shallying, so looking at one and so consulting the other, that I defy anybody to make him out."

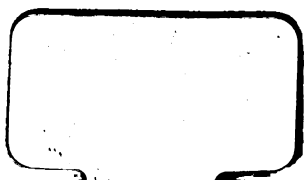
"Suppose you don't try, but let the matter go on of itself, and unravel itself. It is the best course in these cases."

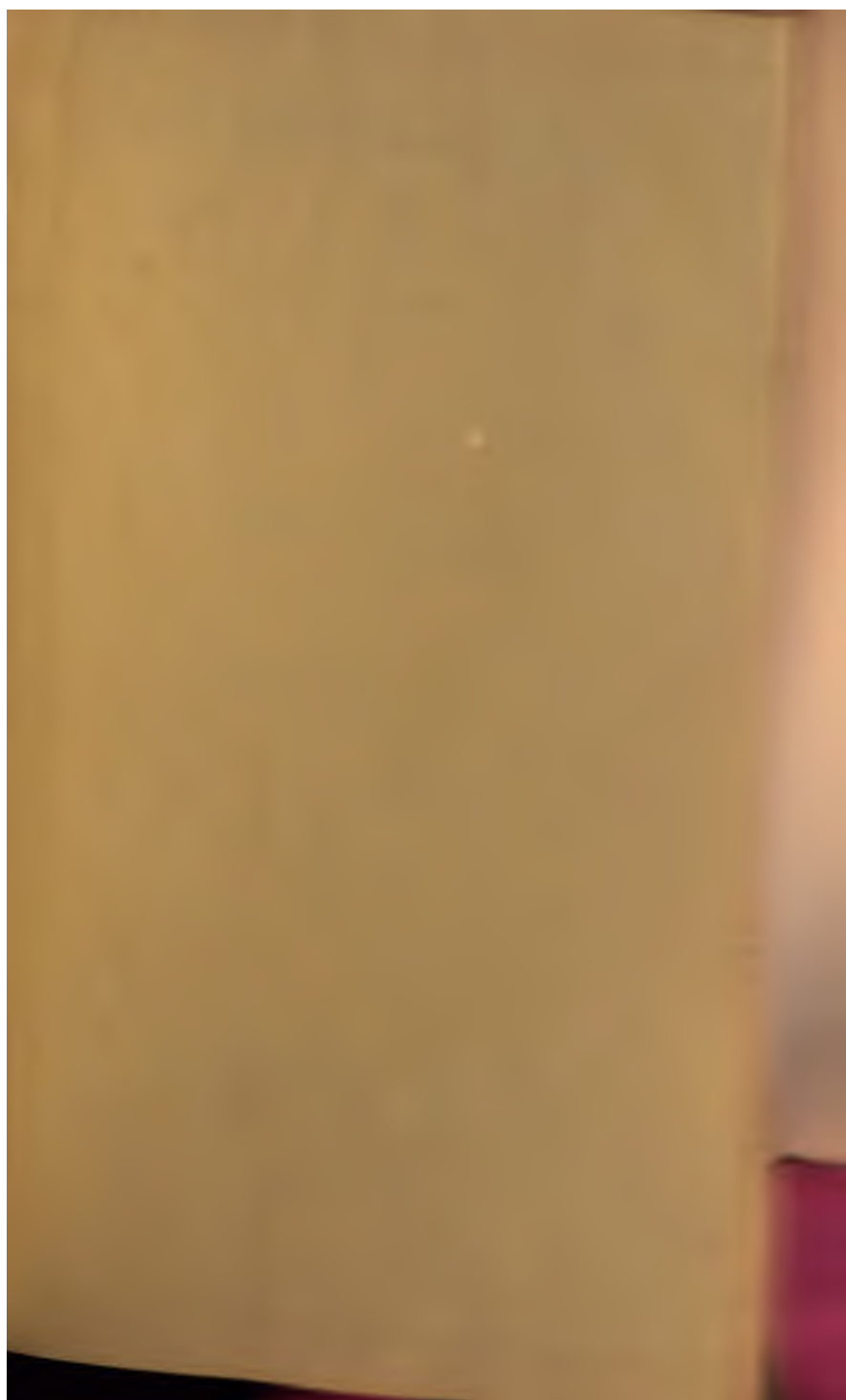
"That shows that you don't enter into a mother's feelings at all. If I let it alone, won't that artful Eleanor, with her sense, of which I must say I think she makes a little parade,—and her interest in parish affairs, which, depend upon it, she would not show if Henry Mordaunt were old and ugly,—won't she win him over to think her superior to my girl with all her beauty and sweet temper and —"

"Excuse me for interrupting you; I don't quite agree with some of the assertions you have just made; though I will not trouble you with my objections; still, Louisa, I must keep to the opinion that you had



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much better let the young people alone ; Mordaunt is old enough, and, I presume, sensible enough, to judge for himself, and, depend upon it, he will do so. Believe me, you should at once give up attempting to sway or lead a man where his affections are concerned. Remember what Molière says —

“ Je sais que sur les vœux on n’a point de puissance
Que l’amour veut partout naître sans—”

“ I don’t care what Molière says.”

“ There you are wrong ; Molière is a judge of ‘ *la belle passion* ’—scarcely inferior to our own Shakespeare.”

“ I don’t want either Shakespeare’s opinion or Molière’s ; I want yours.”

“ But do you not suppose that our means of forming correct opinions become strengthened by our consulting the best judges of human nature who have gone before us ? ”

“ Yes, yes, I dare say they do. But now

do tell me, from what you have observed, which do you think has really taken Henry Mordaunt's fancy?"

"Why, truly, he appears to me at present

‘The swan’s down feather—
That stands upon the swell at full of tide,
And neither way inclines.’”

Mrs Lonsdale gave a little movement of impatience, which she was often tempted to do when her brother indulged in his love of quotations, which, whether apt or not, were invariably thrown away upon her.

"But to be quite candid with you, Louisa, I felt almost certain, last Christmas, that he was becoming attached to Eleanor."

"To El—e—a—nor!!!—"

"To Eleanor; and I really was very glad of it, for it would be an excellent thing for her—a girl without a fortune, and depending upon an aunt with whom I for one certainly could not live, let the alternative be what it might; a home of her own would

be an excellent thing for her, and I looked forward to a great deal of gratitude from old Mrs Grant for the introduction. I really don't know a young man more to my taste than Mordaunt—a gentlemanly fellow with no vulgarity of any kind about him ; I felt quite proud of introducing him to the Bishop when he lunched here last week. Mordaunt comes of a good stock too. A man with a grandfather, ay, and a great grandfather and—”

“For goodness sake, James, don't go on so about him ; what, in the name of pity, makes you think that he is attached to that Eleanor? I am sure, if he does marry her, she will have inveigled him into it ; she has a kind of sly way with her, which I always detested from a child.”

“Softly, Louisa ; Mordaunt is no fool to be inveigled into what he does not intend. If he proposes to your daughter, or to poor little Nelly” (here Mr Bromley's voice softened a little), “it will be from decided affection.”

"Why do you say '*if?*'" said Mrs Lonsdale querulously, "when you said just now that Henry Mordaunt *is* attached to *little Nelly*," (here her voice was as bitter as it could be,) "as you call her."

"Perhaps it is to be regretted," said Mr Bromley softly, and helping himself to a biscuit, "that your charming sex do not learn a little logic—just a little—merely to save themselves from the pain of false inferences. I said I had thought Mordaunt would be attached (poor fellow, how we are dissecting him, to be sure). I did not say that he is."

"Well then, James," said Mrs Lonsdale, mollified, "I should be so much obliged to you if you would tell me clearly what you do think of the matter, now; for, I assure you, I have scarcely closed my eyes for the last two nights. I would not have my sweet child's affections trifled with for the whole world."

"It is a great mistake to be anxious about anything," said Mr Bromley. "Let things take their course ; over-anxiety often makes us act as irrationally as the children we smile to see taking up the things they have planted to find out if they are growing."

At this moment the sound of gay voices was heard from the shrubbery in front of the dining-room, followed by a joyous laugh.

"There go the subjects of our discourse," said Mr Bromley ; "suppose I constitute myself a corps of observation, and go to the window and try to discover anything which may help to solve our doubts," and he smilingly rose and went to the open window ; Mrs Lonsdale remained gloomily in her place—a gentle, amused laugh from her brother made her turn her head and look a question, though she would not speak it.

"Worse and worse," exclaimed Mr Bromley. "He has gathered two sprigs of myrtle and given one to Flora and the other to Eleanor."

I must give up the matter now as hopelessly dubious, unless I could be near enough to count the leaves, as the majority might possibly imply something."

"You really are too bad to jest upon such a subject," said Mrs Lonsdale in a tone of annoyance, for she had not by any means recovered from the effect of her brother's observation about Mr Mordaunt and Eleanor at Christmas. "There is one comfort, however," she continued, after a pause, during which she had sat with knitted brows; "Eleanor must go back to Bath shortly, and then she cannot stand in my girl's way."

"You forget that Eleanor is a much older acquaintance of Mordaunt's than Flora, and therefore cannot reasonably be said to have come in her way."

This remark being unanswerable, Mrs Lonsdale did not answer it, but, after feeling in the pocket of her dress and producing a jingling sound of keys, she said something about

making tea, and rose to break up a conference which had proved so much less satisfactory than she had hoped; she regarded her brother's opinion something in the light of an oracle, and she had anticipated that it would confirm her own, which was that Mr Mor-daunt was very much captivated by her pretty Flora, and that if ever he had thought of Eleanor at all he certainly had no thoughts to spare for her now. "Men are so deceiving, you never can understand them till they quite declare themselves," was her uncomfortable thought between the dining-table and the door.

"If quite convenient to you," said Mr Bromley, very politely, "we will have tea a quarter of an hour later than usual, for I expect the clerk, who is always punctual, in five minutes, and I must have a little conversation with him. Do not forget, to-night, if you please, to add a little, mind a very little, of the orange-peko, it improves the flavour of the

tea. The Bishop told me that he always has a very small black-currant leaf put into the pot ; I have not yet tried that, but we can do so to-morrow at breakfast, perhaps, if you can remember it."

In no very amiable frame of mind Mrs Lonsdale listened to this direction, and then proceeded to the drawing-room to await the arrival of Mr Mordaunt and the girls, who had left their dessert early to take a walk to a neighbouring farm house. She took up the *Times*, trying to interest herself, but feeling restlessly anxious for an opportunity of resuming her post of observation. She had not been very long alone when the door was opened gently, and the subject of her anxious meditation entered. Mr Mordaunt, the young Rector of Steyne, a parish adjoining Carstone, appeared certainly worthy of the value she set upon him. He was prepossessing in person ; gentlemanly in manners ; bore a high character ; came of gentle lineage ; and,

above all, in her eyes, was the incumbent of a very good living, and had funded property, besides ; just enough, as she prudently considered, to enable him to make a good settlement upon her daughter ; in short, he was a man calculated to satisfy both prudence and romance, and this is what all will agree is not to be met with every day.

The very anxious look of Mrs Lonsdale induced Mr Mordaunt to take the chair next to her, and to inquire very kindly if she were feeling unwell. " No, I thank you," she replied, with a little sigh, " I am as well as usual, only I am making myself a little uncomfortable, as foolish mothers are apt to do."

" Indeed ! and may I ask with what reason ? " he exclaimed, with a degree of interest which she did not fail to mark.

" Why, reason or no reason, mothers are silly beings, sometimes ; and though there may be nothing at all in it, I do not like Flora's looks lately, poor dear child ! "

"Miss Lonsdale's looks!—I assure you, had you seen her just now you would have thought Hebe herself not a more perfect picture of blooming health."

"Ah, that is just what I mean. At one time her colour is so bright, and then it so quickly changes. I am sure I don't know, but I am afraid it may be a bad sign."

A shadow seemed to fall upon the young man's countenance; and they were both silent, till the servant entered with the tea-tray. Mrs Lonsdale watched the face of her companion, furtively, from behind the steaming urn; and nothing could have been more satisfactory to her than its gloom. "Where are those girls so long?" she said at length. "I hope they will be down before their uncle comes in to tea, for he likes to see every one assembled. Bless me! I had forgotten all about the orange peko," and she hastily threw a little into

the tea-pot. "Did they come in as soon as you did, Mr Mordaunt?"

"Yes," said he, absently, "I believe they did."

"Believe they did; are you not sure of it?"

"Yes, I am quite sure of it. Perhaps they are a little tired; we walked home fast, fearing we should be late."

"Had you a pleasant walk?"

"Yes, very pleasant indeed, and in the wood at the back of farmer Bailey's we heard a nightingale. I never heard one sing so sweetly before."

"Very likely, because you have before mistaken thrushes for nightingales, which I very often do. I am always obliged to say to Flora, who has such a correct ear, 'Flora, my dear, is that a thrush, or a blackbird, or a nightingale, or a wood pigeon, or what is it?'"

At this moment a girl of slender, almost fragile, figure and quiet graceful movements

glided noiselessly into the room. She had heard Mrs Lonsdale's last speech—and there was a look of amusement, to which was added something of a naughty satirical expression, upon her countenance. This was Eleanor Stuart; she had dark hair, very soft and silky—long, but not abundant, which had a certain elegant way of its own of being adjusted in the fashion, and yet a little departing from it, as if to suit the character of its owner; she had deep, dark, expressive eyes, and a pale complexion, requiring animation of feeling to light it up. As to her claim to beauty, opinions very much varied. When in good health and spirits, some would pronounce her lovely, while others would declare that they saw nothing in her. Perhaps the chief impression she gave at first sight, and for ever afterwards, was that of great refinement—refinement of mind as well as of manners. About her dress there was something rather

too unstudied ; some eyes might have preferred a little more addition or ornament ; still, whatever she did wear was always in faultless taste. But we must not linger over her portrait, for one has just followed her into the room who looks as if she deserved a speedy notice. Flora Lonsdale was a fair, fresh young beauty, with the bright tints of health added to the glow of early bloom ; she had a complexion of clear and dazzling fairness, eyes of blue, and an abundant mass of sunny hair of the golden tint so rarely seen. She wore a dress of a light material, with a white ground and small green flowers, with ribbons to match in every part where there was an excuse for their appearing, and she was adorned with all the little additions supposed to show natural charms to the best advantage. Many might suppose at the first sight of these two girls, that Mrs Lonsdale could have no doubt as to the destination of the heart of Henry Mordaunt. Perhaps

she had but little herself as she watched the approach of her fair young daughter, and marked the gentle care with which he gave her a seat by his side. She looked up at Eleanor, as if to watch its effect upon her also.

"As the tea is quite ready," said Eleanor, "had I not better fetch Uncle James? I know Weston tires him sometimes, and that will be a hint for him to go."

"As you like," said Mrs Lonsdale; "you ought to know by this time whether your uncle does or does not like to be disturbed when talking about parish business."

"I will take the consequence upon myself," said Eleanor, smiling, and she left the room.

Mr Mordaunt turned to Flora, and said :—
"What always appears so agreeable in your cousin's disposition is, that even in trifles she thinks so much of others."

"Yes," replied Flora, looking down and playing with her sprig of myrtle. The anxi-

ous look returned to Mrs Lonsdale's mouth ; poor lady, her mind was like a floating bit of thistle-down upon a breezy day, now wafted high in the air, and now blown down to the ground.

"Unselfishness is the most charming of virtues," continued the unconscious Mr Mor-daunt.

"Yes," said Flora, "it certainly is ; I quite agree with you."

"Why," broke in Mrs Lonsdale, with a little twitching sort of smile, "I don't quite see the very great virtue of a girl merely walking from one room to another to announce that tea is ready."

"There is nothing in that, taken alone, I admit, but one little trait often draws the attention to stores of good, as the one little violet in the hedge-row tells us that spring is coming."

"Upon my word, you have been listening to nightingales to some purpose," said Mrs

Lonsdale, with the same uneasy smile. "They have taught you to bring a great deal out of nothing."

"But, mamma," said Flora, "Mr Mordaunt is right; Eleanor does think a great deal about other people, and their concerns; I remember how unhappy she was when we heard that unexpected news that Captain Hatherley was engaged to Miss Markham; she had a great many doubts indeed about their happiness."

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs Lonsdale, pretending to frown, "you must not bring forward such instances as that of a young lady's unselfishness. But she meant no harm, poor innocent pet; she is truth and nature itself," and she glanced at Mr Mordaunt, and then leaned towards her darling, and gave her an affectionate kiss. Mr Mordaunt looked a little startled at the last observation of Flora, and then he became silent and thoughtful, which was a habit with him when anything struck

him either pleasantly or the reverse ; a little silence fell upon the party, but it was not of long continuance, for the sound of voices was heard along the rather long passage which led from the dining-room to the drawing-room, like the tones of those who agree well together, for a difference is perceptible even when no words are distinguishable. Mr Bromley and his niece entered, the latter bearing in her arms a very antiquated cat of an unusual size, a creature unpopular with the establishment generally, and not a favourite of Mr Bromley's, who looked upon pets as things causing trouble, and therefore to be eschewed. Poor old puss, by name Cato, was with him only upon sufferance ; because an old friend, who left England some years ago, had begged him to take charge of it. Eleanor had taken Cato under her protection, because from a child she had always been particularly tender to anything that was neglected. To be unloved was, to her childish mind, the saddest of all sad things, and we

suppose that the feeling must have grown up with her.

“Come, James,” said Mrs Lonsdale, “you have been so long in coming, that I am afraid you will not have the tea in its best flavour; it has been standing rather too long.”

“Never mind,” replied the complacently-smiling gentleman addressed, “anything that you make, my dear Louisa, cannot fail to be delightful. Thank you, my dear,” to Eleanor, as she wheeled his easy chair round to the exact position in which he liked it to be. His cup of fragrant tea was handed to him, and he soon made himself as comfortable as he had been over his wine.

“What do you mean to do about breakfast to-morrow?” asked his sister, “must we have it at half-past eight?”

“No, nothing of the sort; I have got Watson to persuade the young man to defer his wedding till half-past ten; who ever heard of such an hour as half-past nine for a wedding,

just as one begins to think of sitting down to breakfast? These people really don't seem to take one's comfort into consideration at all; Watson is a very good fellow, and has talked them into a good humour about it, for, of course, it does not do to appear ungracious on such occasions."

"Neither does it do," said Mrs Lonsdale, "to be made uncomfortable for a whole day, which I know it always makes me, to have breakfast before my usual time."

"Why did you take any trouble at all about it, sir?" exclaimed Mr Mordaunt, energetically. "Why, if you had said half a word to me, I would have come and married them, poor creatures, at any hour of the day or night they liked to mention."

"And have brought down upon yourself that mysteriously dreadful thing, a faculty, in consequence," said Eleanor.

"How you bring down the flight of one's impulses, Miss Stuart; I advise you to take a

farm yard, you would so much enjoy clipping the wings of the poor poultry."

"How can you be so matter-of-fact," said Mrs Lonsdale, reprovingly, "when you know that nobody could be more exemplary than Mr Mordaunt in his parish, and nobody could understand better about canonical hours, and all that, than he does?"

"Little Nelly turned matter-of-fact! that is really too shocking," said Mr Bromley, laughing in a sort of manner which Mrs Lonsdale did not quite like. But a great event soon turned her attention from everything else. The well-tutored little page entered, bearing two notes upon a beautifully polished salver. Two notes! all eyes were turned upon them with an interest of which only those who are acquainted with a dull country neighbourhood can have any conception. There the sight of a note, with the exciting addition of "waiting for an answer," possesses a charm which the gay inhabitant of a town, wearied

with the sight of such things, and sick of engagements, will be at a loss to understand. One note was for Mr Bromley, and the other for Mrs Lonsdale. The latter immediately exclaimed,—“Listen here, girls! here is a treat in store—a dinner party at Sir Thomas Headington’s for Tuesday, got up in haste to welcome his son, who is just come home from the Cape.”

“Dear me,” said Mr Mordaunt, “that is the very day we fixed with old Mrs Grey to have whey and curds and tea at her house.”

“But surely you don’t call *that* an engagement?” exclaimed Mrs Lonsdale; “can’t you drink tea with that old woman any night you choose? when such a thing as a dinner party at Sir Thomas Headington’s does not take place every day in the year, I can assure you.”

“But we must not keep the messenger waiting. Dear me, where is my writing-case? Oh, on that little table. Thank you,

Mr Mordaunt. Bless me, what pens ! I never did see such things."

"Allow me to mend one for you."

"Thank you, you are very kind,—as quick as you can, if you please, for I cannot bear to keep a servant waiting."

"Nelly," said Mr Bromley, lazily stretching out his hand to give her his note, without rising, "go into the study, my dear, if you please, and on the table near the window you will find a pen with a very broad nib. Just answer this, and accept the invitation for me, there's a good girl, in as manly a hand as you can manage." Smiling at the task given to her, Eleanor left the room, and soon returned with a gentlemanly-looking note. Mrs Lonsdale, after finding more fault with her pen, finished hers, and after they had both been despatched, much conversation followed about the dinner party in prospect.

"My dear," said Mrs Lonsdale to Flora, "what a charming opportunity for you to wear that lovely green silk, which I was regretting

only last night having gone to the expense of getting for you ; for really, I said to myself, in such a neighbourhood as this evening dresses are mere lumber, and get out of fashion before one has the ghost of a chance of wearing them. But now I am so glad that I got it for you, my dear ; not one person in a hundred can wear green," she added, turning to Mr Mordaunt, " but as Flora *can*, I decided that she should. Of course there is a note at your house for you."

" I never can answer for anything beforehand. If we meet to-morrow, I will tell you."

" You promised to read Eugene Aram's Dream, this evening," said Eleanor, handing him a small edition of Hood. " Are you in a humour for it now ? "

" Oh, Eleanor," said Mrs Lonsdale, " I am sure Mr Mordaunt looks tired to death, and I think we had better not have Eugene Aram, which I have heard is a book with a very bad moral."

"Between the opposed wishes of two ladies, what am I to do, Mr Bromley?"

"If Louisa will be obliging enough to withdraw her objection, I should very much enjoy hearing the Dream."

"Certainly, anything everybody likes," said that lady, taking up her work with the air of a martyr.

Mr Mordaunt had a rich voice, full of energy, and he read the beautiful poem in a way which delighted Mr Bromley, and kept Eleanor in fixed attention, while Flora sat like a lovely statue by the side of the reader, whose eyes were not unfrequently turned towards her, when he came to any passage which he particularly admired. Perhaps he was seeking in those blue orbs for sympathy and answering feeling. At all events, the observant Mrs Lonsdale thought that he did, and she began to consider this tiresome reading out of Eugene Aram's Dream not such

a bad thing after all. Music followed the poetry, and terminated this evening as it had previously done many a happy sociable one at Carstone Rectory. Mrs Lonsdale was well pleased with the rapt attention with which Mr Mordaunt listened to the ballads which her daughter sung so sweetly. Alas ! that such prying, worldly, calculating eyes should be so often employed in trying to search into the depths of the sweetest and holiest of human feelings. All went as well as her heart could wish, till the moment of leave-taking, and then all seemed spoiled, by Mr Mordaunt begging Eleanor, in the most friendly way possible, to allow him to bring the plans for his new school-house for her opinion, on the afternoon of the following day. He had always admired her taste in drawing, and it was a pursuit of which he was equally fond.

“ I thought you said that you were going to Brainbridge to-morrow ? ” said Mrs Lonsdale ungraciously.

“ Yes, so I am in the morning, but I shall be back by two o’clock.”

“ What, another Poor Law battle ! ” exclaimed Mr Bromley ; “ why don’t you keep yourself quiet, and leave things to right themselves, which some assure us they will in due course of time ? ”

“ Every man according to his own mode of action,” returned he, smiling, as he shook hands with his host. A silence followed his departure ; each seemed occupied by some thought quietly filling the mind. Eleanor went to the piano, and continued playing a soft, low, monotonous kind of air, as if she were not thinking of what she was doing, and Mr Bromley’s eyes were fixed upon her slender form thus placed in shadow, and, for such a man as he was, the expression of his countenance was very thoughtful indeed.

CHAPTER II.

"The poor too often turn away unheard
From hearts that shut against them with a sound
That will be heard in heaven. Pray tell me more
Of your adversities. Keep nothing from me."

The Spanish Student.

THE Rectory garden looked most lovely in the radiant light of morning. Eleanor wandered from bed to bed, culling carefully flowers of the purest white, of which she formed a bouquet, tastefully relieved by green leaves. It was intended for the pretty young bride, Mary Daniells, always a favourite with Eleanor on account of her industrious habits, and her

cheerful, pleasant temper. She was to be married to a young man who, before his engagement, had been of wild and roving habits; but since Mary had consented to be his wife he had appeared an altered man. Eleanor thought much of him, and of Mary's chances of happiness, as she thoughtfully added one dewy flower after another to her beautiful group. And then she asked herself a question, which many a woman's heart has asked of itself: "What is the extent of her influence over that stronger, and perhaps sterner being, to whom she may unite herself? Where lies her peril and where her hope?" She had come to the conclusion that, if love for her alone kept him right, her peril must be great and her hope small, when the voice of Mrs Lonsdale bade her loiter no longer in the garden, but hasten in to breakfast. She soon appeared in the breakfast-room, carrying her bouquet in for admiration, before it was despatched to the cottage

of Mary's mother. It certainly looked very pretty, with a small white lily for its centre, and bordered with green. Mr Bromley, who had just broken the shell of his new-laid egg, paused, and gave it a due share of applause.

"It is pretty, certainly," said Mrs Lonsdale, "but too good for the occasion; such a present sent to a rough-handed cottager seems to me in bad taste."

"Aunt Louisa, do you know Mary Daniells?"

"Of course I do; she is a decent young woman enough, who has been here two or three times to alter your dresses, or something of the sort."

"Such an interesting girl," said Eleanor, looking down on her bouquet, "surely is not unworthy of a few garden flowers?"

"Not at all, not at all," said that lover of ease and hater of disputes Mr Bromley, "so ring the bell, and send Isaac off with it."

"Do not mistake me, Eleanor," said Mrs Lonsdale, "I think it all very well to be kind

to the poor, but it is not so well to treat them like friends and equals. It is we who teach them to forget their station by doing so."

"Perhaps if we forgot this difference of station more, they would remember it better. You know, aunt, how well Mr Mordaunt gets on with his parishioners; and yet how they respect him, because he visits them as a sympathising friend, and not as a dry teacher too clever and too good to be considered of the same clay as themselves."

"It is not desirable for you, my dear Eleanor, to quote Mr Mordaunt's opinions upon all occasions, or to be blindly guided by them."

Eleanor made no reply, because she felt that she was angry.

Mr Bromley, having despatched his egg and some slices of well-cured ham, proceeded to finish his breakfast with dry toast, prepared for him on M. Soyer's plan of turning it four times in

the course of toasting. Mr Bromley was happy in possessing a cook who took almost as much pleasure in indulging his whims as he felt in having them studied. He was a liberal master, by which we mean he not only gave good wages to his servants, but allowed them abundance of material with which to carry out his wishes; he was therefore popular in his household, and well served. His sister was with him more in the character of a permanent visitor than as the mistress of his establishment. His behaviour to her was polite and liberal, though neither affectionate nor confidential. It suited him to have a lady to superintend some things, which only ladies understand, and somebody he required to make his tea, and take every little troublesome matter off his hands. It also suited Mrs. Lonsdale extremely well to remain with her daughter at Carstone Rectory, and be thus enabled to spend her small income in dress, &c., for herself and Flora, who, being a pretty girl,

she often said to herself, was *sure* to marry well, and was therefore secure for the future.

As we have said, Mr Bromley was leisurely eating his toast, leaving himself a full half hour between breakfast and the wedding, when the newspapers, with one letter for Mrs Lonsdale, arrived.

“Who is it from, mamma?” asked Flora.

“From Bath, my dear, from Aunt Jane. I wonder how she is, poor thing! Not so well, I am afraid, because Eleanor has been away from her so long. How do you think her writing looks, James? Rather shaky it seems to me.”

“How should a lady’s writing look but shaky, Louisa, who sees a doctor every day, and lives on barley water and beef tea? Nelly, just air that *Times* in the sun a little, and ring the bell for my boots, will you, my dear? It is rather a bore to have to put on boots at this time in the morning, when one is accustomed to wear slippers till one o’clock, but certainly,

weddings do n't take place every day in Carstone."

Eleanor did as she was asked, but there was something slower and more absent in her manner than ordinary.

"Dear me, poor Jane!" exclaimed Mrs Lonsdale, who had been glancing down her letter. "I am afraid, my dear Eleanor, that we cannot press you to remain away from her any longer. But you shall judge for yourself. Listen to what she says, poor dear!—

"I assure you, my dear Louisa, I quite envy any person who enjoys one half-hour of health in the day. I am sure it must take a great deal of pain and weakness to kill anybody, or I should have been dead long ago. Last night I can scarcely say that I had any sleep at all, I heard every clock strike, one after another. I don't know what it was from, excepting that I was tempted to eat one or two water-cresses with my tea, which I have always understood to be most wholesome, but you see this shows that

what is wholesome to other people is not wholesome to me. When I awoke this morning—’”

“ Stop, stop,” cried Mr Bromley, “ that calls for explanation. How can a person be said to wake who, according to her own report, has not been to sleep at all ? ”

“ Now, James, you must not be down in that way upon every word in a poor invalid’s letter, who, I dare say, could scarcely see to write it. Let me see, where was I ? ‘ When I awoke this morning, I felt such a burning pain over my eyes, that I sent off for Mr Vincent, who came at about half-past eleven, and he told me that I must be very careful indeed with my diet. In fact, he as good as told me that I must live by rule ; you know what effect a sleepless night has upon me. I am to-day just like a silly person, and I scarcely know what I am writing about.’ ”

“ So I should think,” observed Mr Bromley. *De grace*, Louisa, spare us any more of that, for I must get ready to go to the church.”

"Oh, wait for us, wait for us, Uncle James," exclaimed Flora, jumping up, "we are going with you, for I have never seen anybody married; and we shan't be two minutes putting on our bonnets. Come, Eleanor, *do* come."

"Louisa," said Mr Bromley, when the girls had left the room, as he looked up with a rather flushed face from the exertion of getting on his boots.

"Well?" said she, looking up from her letter.

"Eleanor does not return to Bath before the dinner party or the tea drinking at Mrs Grey's, because her Aunt Jane chose to eat two or three water-cresses with her tea."

Mrs Lonsdale bit her lips, and knitted her brows, and shook her right foot backwards and forwards under the table, but she made no reply; she never did when her brother was determined.

"Eleanor, do be quick, or we shall be late," called out Flora from the landing, where she was standing in her becoming straw-bonnet;

her lovely colour heightened by the haste she had made.

"So, Miss," said Maria, the housemaid, who met her also dressed to go to the church, "you are going to see the wedding, are you? Going to take a lesson, Miss?"

"Nonsense, Maria," she replied, with a smile and a blush.

"Don't tell me, Miss; I could tell you what people say, if I liked; a young gentleman, I don't say who, with beautiful black hair and whiskers, don't come here so often for nothing." Here Maria tripped quickly down the backstairs, for Eleanor was seen advancing from her room; and though she was considered by Mrs Lonsdale to hold very levelling notions with regard to her inferiors, the flippanant maid would not for an instant have thought of saying what she had just said in her presence.

"Eleanor, how *very* pale you look this morning," said the brightly blushing Flora, passing her arm caressingly round her cousin's

waist, as they walked downstairs together. The observation that had just before been addressed to her had filled her heart with pleasurable emotion, and she yearned for sympathy; but the form to which she clung was quite passive, and did not return her caress.

"Come, young ladies," said Mr Bromley, "we have just time to walk up the hill, and it will never do to keep a bride waiting."

As they ascended the hill, Flora and Mr Bromley had nearly all the talk to themselves. Eleanor's thoughts turned unpleasantly to Mrs Lonsdale's comments upon the letter from Bath, and she determined to shorten the time that yet remained before the termination of her visit; other reflections perchance mingled with these, and a weight was upon her spirit which she could not shake off. Mr Bromley, who always did what he had to do in the most approved style, went through the marriage service in a way that excited the admiration of the spectators who had walked up from the

village. In the midst of her agitation the bride cast one grateful look at Eleanor, and then looked down on her pretty bouquet. This one glance seemed to alter the tone of Eleanor's mind, so true it is, that

“ All worldly joys go less
To the one joy of doing kindnesses.”

However trifling our thought for others has been, it returns to our spirit pleasantly, even if it be but as the perfume wafted to us as we pass from the plants we have cherished and tended.

“ What a fine young man the bridegroom is,” whispered Flora ; “ does he not remind you the very least bit in the world of Mr Mordaunt ? Oh, Eleanor, how should you feel if you were standing there at the altar just where Mary Daniells is ? ”

“ I hope as Mary Daniells does ; her ideas are so just, so simple, and so true, that she has given me many a lesson.”

Both the young girls seemed impressed

by the ceremony. They did not accompany Mr Bromley back to the Rectory, but, tempted by the exhilarating morning air, seated themselves in the church-yard on the fantastic roots of an old alder which grew close to the wall, and over-shadowed the road. The village looked calm and lovely in the valley beneath them, and Eleanor could not suppress the feeling of regret that rose in her heart as she remembered that she must so soon quit scenes so congenial to her taste, and that tranquil village-life which she felt that she could love so well; she had not yet learnt that the place as well as the position appointed to us is that which is best fitted for our real discipline and usefulness. It is strange how long we are in finding out some truths, in themselves so simple that, when once understood, we marvel that we should ever have required the teaching.

Eleanor was roused from her reverie (and we will not now confess how far it was carry-

ing her) by Flora laying her small white hand upon her shoulder, and looking earnestly in her face.

"Eleanor, there is one thing that I want so much to talk to you about."

"Perhaps you had better not," replied Eleanor, hurriedly. "There are some things about which it is better to say nothing."

"Oh, Eleanor, why do you say that? Everybody says that your judgment is so good, and I do want your opinion upon one thing."

"Upon what is really a fact, or upon something which may happen?" asked Eleanor, a flush of eagerness covering her face, which a moment before had been so pale.

"Oh, Eleanor, why do you talk in that reasoning way? You know I never could reason; can't you guess what I mean? you could if you were like other girls."

"Is it a reality?" asked Eleanor again, even sternly.

"No, no: not a reality—I would give the

whole, *whole* world, if it were mine, to make it one."

"Then, Flora, indeed you had better say no more about it. Realities are soon settled, and imaginations had much better not be encouraged, lest they become of so much importance as to rob us of our peace."

"Why then, what could there be left to talk about, if you settle it all in that way?" said Flora, in a tone which at any other time would have made Eleanor smile.

"Do not think I mean unkindly, indeed I do not," said Eleanor, as she leaned down and hastily kissed the fair face so inquiringly raised to hers. "But now," she added, rising, seeing that Flora was again going to speak, "I am going down by the back-lane into the village, as there are two or three people I want to see before lunch."

"But why may I not—" Flora hastily cut her sentence short, for the sound of a horse's hoofs was heard in the distance, and glancing

brightly and conspicuously in the sunshine was seen the shining coat of a well-known grey horse, which both the girls knew could belong but to one rider.

Flora made no further attempt to go with Eleanor, who, making no pause, went quickly round by the chancel window, and took the way to the village by the shady back-lane; why so quickly, she would have been at a loss to tell. When about half way down the lane, she slackened her pace, and being attracted by a wild foxglove, towering prettily amongst the grass, she climbed a little way up the steep bank to gather it; while thus occupied, she turned her head in the direction of the hill, and against the wall on the opposite side of the road from the church-yard she saw the broad large shadow of a horse, with its tail whisking backwards and forwards, at war with the flies. Why was that sight unpleasant to her? Was it not exceedingly natural that Mr Mordaunt should stop his horse when he saw

Flora seated at the foot of the old alder tree? Would he not have done the same if it had been herself? Would it not have been very uncourteous, considering their terms of intimacy, had he not done so? True, true, and yet—yet what? “Oh, pitiful feeling, whence come you? away! I will none of you,” and she leaped down the bank and proceeded on her walk.

Apparently she might have made a better selection for her first visit than that untidy-looking house, just opposite the pound; the sight of which made every good housewife in Carstone pride herself not a little when she returned to her own better-ordered home. Mr Bromley had been heard to say that Sally Jennings was, in fact, quite a benefactress to the place; as she taught every woman, by her example, what she ought not to do as regarded her husband, her children, and her household. With the enthusiasm of youth, whose happiness it is to believe

all things possible, and the mere showing of truth the way to make people follow it, Eleanor had paid Sally frequent visits, having her complete reformation for their end; but these visits had hitherto produced no fruit, their only result having been the making industrious little Mary Gardiner—who lived round the corner, and kept two pigs, one for home consumption, and the other for sale—observe to her husband, when he was enjoying a very good dinner, one pig-killing day, that she really thought that Miss Eleanor must be very fond of good-for-nothing, lie-about people, for she was so often going in to see Sally Jennings. Upon which William Gardiner, a prudent and peace-loving man, looked unutterable things at her, to make her understand that her words might be overheard by their next-door neighbour, then in her garden, and reported accordingly.

You cannot stand upon the threshold of a house belonging either to rich or poor without

gaining at a glance some idea of the character of its inmates. A very trifle is an index, to an experienced eye. There needed, however, no seeking for the little things that tell of greater, on entering the dwelling of Sally Jennings, into which Eleanor skilfully made her way so as to avoid stumbling over a pail, a broom, a three-legged stool, and other articles out of their right places. The kitchen bore the appearance of having been half-cleaned, that is, the centre of the floor had been washed, while dust and other evidences of untidiness could be seen in corners and crevices, and under uncomfortably-placed, neglected furniture. A few long-withered flowers were in a broken jug in the window-seat, emitting an unpleasant smell from their decomposing stalks,—a sad emblem of what the fairest and sweetest things of earth, if neglected, may become. There is scarcely a sadder sight than flowers fading and uncared for; and we always fancy that they immediately

give an unfavourable impression of those who suffer them so to remain before their eyes. Sally Jennings rose when Eleanor entered, and wiped down a chair for her with a ragged, dirty-looking cloth. Eleanor would very much have preferred the seat in its original dusty condition, but she was far too polite to refuse it, unpleasant as it had been made to her. Sally resumed her seat and her occupation, which was that of clumsily putting a coarse patch into a shirt for her husband. She looked in a sulky silent humour, which was not usual with her.

“I hope you are quite well to-day?” said Eleanor, feeling that the burden of the conversation was left to her.

“As well as one can be in this wordell,” replied Sally, gloomily.

“And your husband is well, I hope?”

“Oh, he—there’s never nothing the matter with *he*.”

“And your children?”

"I wish I never had none."

Eleanor drew her chair closer, thinking that she was now approaching the reason of the woman's evident disquiet; but the needle went on over the patch, and no word further was said.

"Are you in any trouble then about your children?" asked Eleanor gently, after watching her a little while in silence.

"What do such as you care?" answered Sally, in a bitter tone. "You will only, may-hap, make game of such things when they happen to poor folk; though you may break your own heart over the like one of these days."

"Sally," said Eleanor still more gently, "is it about Jane?"

Sally worked on very fast for a little bit, and then, dropping her work upon her knee, she looked up with her eyes glowing like two live coals.

"The rascal was married this morning. You went to see un, did n't ye?"

She took up her work again, and sewed away faster than before. When she again looked up, she met the soft, tender expression of Eleanor's pitying dark eyes.

"Yes, Miss, he is a rascal, and the biggest of rascals ; to keep company wie my poor girl, and then take up wie another. 'T ull be the death au Jane, poor theng. All the ill I do wish un is, that au may ha sorrow upon sorrow to au's dying day."

Eleanor drew still closer to Sally. She expressed no horror at her unchristian spirit ; she gave no word of blame, but she began with commiseration of the gentlest, tenderest kind ; she used the language of the heart, and spoke as woman should speak to woman in distress, and she did not cease until she saw hot, scalding, large drops fall upon the work in Sally's lap. Then she knew that the bitterness was passing, and she gave it time to pass ; and then she spoke again, bringing forward all that she could think of to make the best of

what could not be altered, and to bring Sally to a forgiving frame of mind. Sally made no professions, and promised nothing; and yet, when Eleanor rose to go, a feeling of satisfaction was in her heart, so full that it banished every selfish thought that had troubled her; she went forth from the cottage, thinking only of Jane and her mother, and fearing for the happiness of the bride Mary. By a sort of instinct she steered clear of the impediments in her way, and safely round by the dangerous uncovered well to the broken gate. She was not at all inclined for any more visits; so she walked up the back-lane to get by it to the Rectory, which lay on the other side of the hill. It was nearly twelve o'clock when she returned, heated and tired, for every minute appeared to make the day grow more sultry. Before she had time to take off her bonnet, she was called by Mrs Lonsdale, who seemed in great perplexity over a letter which she was writing.

"Come here, Eleanor, I have been thinking so long, and I really cannot make up my mind."

It was the habit of Mrs Lonsdale to begin a subject as if her hearers had been previously following her own train of thought; Eleanor, therefore, stood waiting for what was to follow.

"What do you think?"

"About what, Aunt Louisa?"

"Bless me! I forgot I had not told you that I was going to write to Bath for a wreath for Flora to wear at Sir Thomas Headington's. What do you think, my dear, for you have good taste, and must have noticed something of the fashions in Bath? What flowers do you think will suit Flora best? You know of course she is to wear her new green silk."

"With Flora's beautiful hair, she will look to the best advantage without any flowers; and they are so rarely worn at dinner parties that I do not intend to wear any myself."

"Bless me, child, you are always so quick

in making up your mind, that dress can be no pleasure at all to you. But do you really think that dear Flora had better have no flowers ? ”

“ Certainly I do.”

“ What do you think now of a delicate, very small wreath of white rose-buds ? You know Miss Headington is a very great dresser, such a showy, stylish sort of person. No doubt she will have brought such elegant flowers from Paris.”

“ I cannot retract,” said Eleanor, smiling. “ The ornament that Nature has given to Flora will not be surpassed, I think, by anything that Miss Headington brings from Paris.”

“ Well, my dear,” returned Mrs Lonsdale, very graciously, “ I think I will do as you say, and let Flora go without a wreath.”

Eleanor left the room to relieve herself from her walking attire, which she felt so oppressive. She sat down by the open window, in her own room, letting the cool air fan her brow. What

thought came over her so as to make her suddenly 'rise? There was a restlessness in every movement as she hastily arranged her hair, and then went down-stairs. She went direct to Mr Bromley's study, and tapped at the door, not gently as she generally did, but louder and more quickly. After the usual "Come in," she entered, and found the bland countenance of Mr Bromley turned to her with a slight expression of surprise.

"Why, Nelly, child, I did not think it was you."

"I thought I would come to you now, because I intend to write to Aunt Jane this afternoon."

"Well, my love to Aunt Jane, and I hope soon to hear that she has recovered from the water-cresses."

"But I must fix the day for my return, uncle; I think it had better be Wednesday."

Mr Bromley put down the Essays of Nicole,

over which he had been quietly enjoying himself.

“Why do you wish to return earlier than you fixed before, Eleanor? I do n’t see any reason from your aunt’s letter that you should leave, and she does not even express a wish to that effect. Do you think that she means you to understand that she wants you?”

“No.”

“Then,” said Mr Bromley, decidedly, “you shall not go, you are *my* guest, and I always intend to be master in my own house.”

Eleanor understood him, but before she could reply another tap was heard at the door, and Mrs Lonsdale entered. Hers was, on some occasions, such a clearly-speaking face, that Eleanor felt now that it plainly said to her, “What a bore it is to find you here,” so she took the hint, and departed.

“James,” said Mrs Lonsdale, “I am come to tell you that I have ordered some of your favourite scalloped oysters for your lunch ;

and that they will be up in less than five minutes."

"Thank you," said Mr Bromley, very politely.

"What an exceedingly warm morning it is, to be sure."

"Very warm, indeed, but we must remember that to-day we commence the Dog Days."

"Do we, really? is this the first day of the Dog Days? then no wonder it is so hot." And Mrs Lonsdale commenced a series of little fidgetty movements that betokened that she was on the point of leaving the room. When she reached the door, she turned back, as if a very unexpected idea had just entered her head. "Do you know, James, it has just struck me that as Mr Mordaunt will be here this afternoon (you know he said that he should call with the plans), would it not be better for you to ask him to dinner? Poor man, he will have such a burning ride over Car-

stone Hill, if he goes back before the sun goes down."

"He dined here yesterday ; it will never do to have him again to-day."

"But, James, just put your head out of the window. It is enough to give any one a *coup de soleil*."

"Then I hope, as the weather is in so dangerous a state, that Mordaunt will be wise enough not to come."

"But if he does come, shall I tell him that you hope he will stay to dinner? you know we shall have a charming dish of hashed venison."

"We might as well have hashed mutton, as far as he is concerned, for I never met a man upon whom a good dinner was more completely thrown away."

"Shall I ask him then?"

"Oh, dear no! by no means," said Mr Bromley, quietly.

"But won't it look unkind not to do so?"

“Lunch is ready, if you please, sir.”

After this announcement, Mrs Lonsdale knew that her brother must be detained no longer, so with a discomfited face she accompanied him to partake of the vainly-prepared scalloped oysters.

CHAPTER III.

Madam, your fears
Cast a false glare upon your troubled reason,
That blinds it quite.—*Agamemnon.*

AFTER lunch was over, Eleanor placed herself at a pet little table, which she used for writing, in a pleasant, cool corner of the drawing-room, and commenced a chatty letter to Bath, filling it with every little thing she could think of likely to draw her aunt's mind from her own ailments, and to furnish matter for conversation during the calls of her sympathizing cronies. She promised to bring in person a long description of the dinner-party

at Sir Thomas Headington's. Flora was seated on the sofa busily embroidering a collar, and Mrs Lonsdale, who was reading the *Times*, continued perpetually changing her seat, declaring the heat to be insupportable. At length, newspaper in hand, she sallied through the window, which opened to the ground, on to the lawn, to see if a little fresh air might be found there. After roving from tree to tree, as she had done in the house from chair to chair, she at last gained a shady place, near the entrance gate. She had not been long there, when she saw through the bushes the head of the well-known grey horse, and immediately afterwards Mr Mordaunt appeared, leaning forward to open the gate with his riding-whip. She noticed that his countenance was unusually pale, and that he walked his horse very slowly up the avenue, looking as if something had vexed him. A hundred thoughts of things probable and improbable chased each other through her brain—for she had a disposition

so inquisitive that she was always restless until she had found out the cause of everything great or small. Surely, she thought, Flora could not have said anything last night that had made him uncomfortable. No, that could not be; for she recollected that their last meeting had been in the church-yard, and the remembrance of something that Flora had told her about this meeting made her immediately come to the conclusion that his troubled looks portended that he was now come to make the important avowal, upon the reception of which all his earthly happiness depended, &c. &c., for, if Mrs Lonsdale had been a lover herself, she could not have introduced more fine speeches than those which now entered her thoughts. How fortunate that she had happened to leave the drawing-room; but how was she to get that Eleanor out of the way, who always was *in the way*? How dreadfully tiresome! To call her out upon any pretence would look too pointed.—Would it? No, it

would not, for if it were done in an innocent, unconscious sort of way, it would look all the more unsuspecting. Upon this last idea she acted ; and, crossing the sunny lawn, she entered the drawing-room, and, after accosting Mr Mordaunt, and making a complaint of the weather, she went up to Eleanor, and with an air of playfulness—which did not sit very well upon her—she seized her by the arm, exclaiming, “ You naughty little girl, I really cannot suffer this ; you have been sitting at that stupid writing till you look dying for want of air—Lucy, or Carry, or Fanny, or whoever it is, can wait for another post, I am sure ; and you shall come out with me to see what a little fresh air can do for those poor pale cheeks.”

Eleanor had no choice but to rise to accompany her, when Mr Mordaunt turned to Mrs Lonsdale, and said, “ Excuse Miss Stuart for a few minutes, if you will be so kind ; I have something I wish to consult her about.”

“ Very well, just as you like, only don’t ask

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aspect, ripened fruit of a flavour which even that mighty potentate, Sir Thomas Headington, could not surpass; nay, some have asserted (when they dined with Mr Bromley), could not equal. Mrs Lonsdale passed along a gravel walk upon which a microscope could not have detected a weed, bordered on each side by scientifically pruned gooseberry and currant bushes, and was not long before she caught sight of her brother, who was standing with his hands in his pockets, taking a well-satisfied survey of some very promising bunches of grapes on the outer wall of the hot-house.

“How astonishingly those grapes have improved since Thursday, to be sure!” was her admiring exclamation; “one would really think they grew by magic.”

“They certainly promise very fairly,” replied Mr Bromley, complacently.

“And have you noticed those artichokes at the entrance of the garden? I never saw such

me to join any consultation in such an oven as this ;” and Mrs Lonsdale retreated again into the garden, puzzled for the first few steps, and then reassured ; of course she concluded he naturally felt nervous when the much-desired opportunity did arrive. This looked more like something than anything she had yet observed ; one thing was certain, she would make another attempt upon the obdurate heart of her brother about the invitation to dinner ; she thought she had seen him, a few minutes ago, sauntering towards the turning leading to the kitchen-garden ; she would follow him, and a little adroit flattery upon the weak point of his vegetables and fruit, upon which he particularly prided himself, would, no doubt, gain her purpose. She walked down a path, which, on a less important errand, would have been given up as hopelessly hot, and entered the well-arranged, well-kept kitchen-garden, the very pride of Mr Bromley’s heart ; where, upon the long expanse of that brick wall, with the southern

aspect, ripened fruit of a flavour which even that mighty potentate, Sir Thomas Headington, could not surpass ; nay, some have asserted (when they dined with Mr Bromley), could not equal. Mrs Lonsdale passed along a gravel walk upon which a microscope could not have detected a weed, bordered on each side by scientifically pruned gooseberry and currant bushes, and was not long before she caught sight of her brother, who was standing with his hands in his pockets, taking a well-satisfied survey of some very promising bunches of grapes on the outer wall of the hot-house.

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“ They certainly promise very fairly,” replied Mr Bromley, complacently.

“ And have you noticed those artichokes at the entrance of the garden ? I never saw such

heads in all my life! They are as big as—as big as,—I really do n't know what."

"Yes, they are very fine; we must have some cut for to-morrow."

"Well, I suppose the soil here must be very rich, or the management very good, or something, for I never saw things thrive as they do here."

"Yes, Stevens is a very fair gardener, a very fair gardener indeed."

"And something more, I should say, or Sir Thomas Headington's gardener would not have come to him for advice."

"What, Sir Thomas's gardener come here for advice?"

"Yes, to be sure; Sir Thomas said that he had never tasted any tomatas like the tomatas at your table, and he went home quite angry about it, and said that he paid for the best tomatas, and the best tomatas he would have; so the poor gardener, who scarcely slept all night about it, came here, on pretence of

looking at your picotees, and begged some to-mata seed of Stevens, and asked for a few hints about how he managed with his plants, making him promise not to tell anybody, but he told his wife, and his wife told me."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Stevens is a very valuable man indeed, I can assure you, and Mr Mordaunt is quite of my opinion; as for his own gardener, he said that he always has his own way, and that that way is a bad one. But he is so careless with his servants, and I dare say they rob him, morning, noon, and night; now if such a man does not want a wife, I do n't know who does, and speaking of him I want to talk to you a bit about Flora, for time presses, and Mr Mordaunt is in the drawing-room."

"What?" said Mr Bromley, turning round from the contemplation of his fine clustering grapes, "anything definite?"

"Why, I cannot call it quite definite yet—but something very near it. In fact, he said

things which meant a great deal when he talked with her in the church-yard this morning; amongst other things, that he often felt lonely when riding alone, and now he is come, looking so pale and agitated, and altogether I can't tell you how, that I am sure he must mean something."

Mr Bromley veered round again to his former position, and leaning forward carefully cut off with his gardening scissors a vine leaf which kept part of a bunch concealed from the ripening rays of the sun.

"Well, James, I never did see anybody like you! You must have things all drawn up like a sum, or you won't believe them."

"I am a man of the world, Louisa, and I require a little more evidence than a few gallant speeches, and the fact of a man looking pale, and, if the truth were known, I suppose a little out of temper, after a discussion with a Board of Guardians on a very warm day."

"But women see further than men can,

sometimes, and I am sure if you ask Mr Mordaunt to stay to dinner to-day all will be right. He appears just in the humour, and there is nothing like managing these things at the right time."

"Louisa," said Mr Bromley, very gravely, and again turning to face her, "whatever you may be disposed to do, I shall certainly not take advantage of any man's *humour* as regards any lady under my roof; and understand at once that I will be no party to paying undue attention to a man who, like Mordaunt, has an open field and every reasonable opportunity for making his own way. Indeed, if one studied the matter at all, it ought to be to put difficulties in the way, instead of making it smoother than it is already. No one can call me romantic, I am sure; but, bless my heart, I see no occasion for sending pioneers before lovers to level the road for them. If a woman is worth having, is n't she worth seeking?"

At the end of this speech, he took out his

pocket-handkerchief and blew his nose in a very emphatic manner, and Mrs Lonsdale took out hers and applied it to her eyes.

“Come, Louisa, do n’t get vexing yourself,” said he, returning more to his usual way of speaking. “I assure you I am acting in the best way for your daughter’s real interest; and, besides,” he added, smiling, “take my word for it, this asking to dinner is the most unsatisfactory test possible. You might go on in that way for a twelvemonth, and at the end of it not know whether the young ladies or my fine old Madeira constituted the attraction. Let the matter work itself out, I tell you, and never stoop to court any man. I saw enough of that when I was a young man myself. On one occasion I almost think I should have come forward, if an officious mamma had not led me accidentally, on purpose, through the store-room, where her daughter was engaged tying up jellies and jams, and her remarks upon the occurrence made me suspect that where so

much was thought of a trifle, there could be no real usefulness in the back-ground. Mrs Ellis has taught the women of England a great deal, but if she thinks of bringing out a new edition of her works, I fancy I could give her a valuable hint or two."

Here Stevens was seen coming towards his master with an important air, knowing that his conversation was generally acceptable, and poor Mrs Lonsdale, feeling as most diplomatists do when their efforts fail, turned away and retraced her steps in a slow, discontented manner, along the mercilessly burning walk out of the garden and across the lawn towards the house. Under the extensive shade afforded by the wide-spreading branches of a magnificent cedar, she perceived Flora walking slowly, and occasionally pushing a cedar cone before her with a testy movement of her foot. The bright colour of her beautiful complexion was heightened, and the mother gazed upon her for a moment with mingled admiration and anxiety, and then approached her.

"Is Mr Mordaunt gone, my dear?"

"No," was the short reply.

"Why then did you leave the drawing-room?"

"Mamma, why did you—" and the large blue eyes were raised with an expression in them which troubled Mrs Lonsdale, and filled her with a vague fear.

"My dear child, what do you mean?"

"Mamma, what did you mean when you told me you were certain that he loved me?"

"If he does not, he is a deceitful, mean, double-tongued wretch," exclaimed Mrs Lonsdale, passionately; and she began pacing up and down as far as the shelter of the cedar allowed; then, thinking (for her mind was one of sudden transitions) that she might have been exciting herself without a cause, she stopped before Flora, who was now standing as motionless as a statue.

"What were they talking about, child, when you left the room? Only about the tumble-

down old school-house, I dare say. Is he so stupid that he can't build another without asking her how? But come, quick, tell me what they were saying?"

"I cannot tell."

"Come, Flora, that's downright absurdity; you must have heard something."

"I did *not*. He went up close to her, and spoke in a low tone, so that I heard nothing, and then I came away."

"You did wrong," said Mrs Lonsdale, angrily.

"I was not going to sit there like a nobody," returned Flora, tossing back her head, while the indignant colour mounted to cheek and brow.

"You did *wrong*, I say," repeated Mrs Lonsdale, still more angrily, and immediately she turned from her and walked across the lawn, at her utmost speed, to interrupt this dangerous *tête-à-tête*. Once she glanced hurriedly and crossly back at Flora, and as she

saw her standing, looking even more lovely than usual in the excitement of the moment, the comforting thought arose, that beauty so untouched by time or sorrow—beauty in its first fresh bloom—should fear no rival. Alas! she gave no thought—she never did—to that delicate bloom of the spirit which she was daily doing so much to destroy.

No time for thinking now, but over the lawn she sped—the crow could not have taken a more direct course. When she came close to the window, she stopped, and from behind the shelter of a well-trained and luxuriant clematis gave a furtive glance into the room. Mr Mordaunt was seated at the table, with two or three plans spread out before him; which, with a business-like air, he was explaining to Eleanor, who was sitting opposite to him in an attitude of great attention.

Was this all? Was he, after all her apprehensions, only talking about this school? Was

it likely that any tender feeling could be mixed up with such dry details as those upon which he was evidently expatiating? Improbable in the extreme. She would depart as silently as she had come, and leave him to feel how freely he was allowed to talk with Eleanor, and how wholly innocent she (Mrs Lonsdale) was of the slightest intention of securing him for Flora. Men like the fullest liberty of choice ; her brother was right there ; and yet, was not this unreserved interchange of opinions, even upon dull subjects, a little dangerous? Had not a stupid old college friend of her brother's once said, that *tête-à-tête* conversation was Eleanor's peculiar forte ; adding that a woman's real power lay more in that than in anything more commonly called an accomplishment. Mrs Lonsdale was not one likely to allow any advantage to the enemy. At the remembrance of this observation, her wavering resolution was fixed in a moment. Making a little unnecessary noise, from the consciousness of

having in reality stolen upon the unsuspecting pair, she entered the room.

“ Well, Mr Mordaunt, I hope you have settled your consultation, as you called it, to your satisfaction ; I am sure you have been long enough about it. I expected to find you reading Eugene Aram, or something of that kind—”

“ How can you insult me, Mrs Lonsdale, by thinking I could give my precious time to poetry at this time of the day ? We have been getting on pretty well, but Miss Stuart is rather perverse : she will admire the very portico I intended she should not, and she will consider nothing but space and ventilation, scorning to give one thought to the picturesque.”

“ I am too much accustomed to unfair statements from you to take the trouble to combat them,” returned Eleanor, with a sweeter smile than Mrs Lonsdale at all approved.

“ Well, you must allow something in excuse

for a poor man whose will has been twice thwarted in one day, and that such a warm one."

"You confess, then, that you come round to my opinion."

"Never be so unwise as to bring a man to such a confession. It is bad enough to feel that it is a fact, without being called upon to put it into words."

"Very well; I have heard that an American will pretend not to hear the suggestion of another person; and afterwards he will adopt it as his own original idea. You shall have this privilege, by all means, if you choose."

Mrs Lonsdale sat fanning herself with the *Times*, and looking anything but amiable from behind it. This sort of talk was far from pleasing to her, and her suspicious fancy was not slow to imagine that she detected a secret understanding beneath it. "Really, Eleanor," she said, sharply, "you should not get into the habit of saying such odd things to gentle-

men. Mr Mordaunt is very good-natured to put up with it."

Eleanor's eyes were lighted with a quick spark of anger, and then they were shrouded by her long dark lashes, as she bent down over the plan she held in her hand.

"Thank you, Mrs Lonsdale; you are a true Englishwoman, and take the side of the weakest," said Mr Mordaunt, laughing.

"You said you had been put out twice to-day," observed Mrs Lonsdale, feeling that she had effectually silenced Eleanor, and that the field was open now for a little news for herself.

"Yes, I was very much annoyed at Brainbridge this morning, as Sir Thomas Headington was in one of his decidedly obstinate moods, and it was quite useless to try to persuade him, and if he gives an opinion the rest of the Board always agree with it."

"Oh, I hope you did n't quarrel with Sir Thomas. It is so very inconvenient to be on

bad terms with the Lord of the Manor, he can spite you in so many ways, and you will never be properly supplied with game."

The look of annoyance vanished from Eleanor's mouth, and in its place came the slight sarcastic smile it sometimes wore.

Mr Mordaunt marked the smile, and did not appear to approve of it, for he turned gravely and politely to Mrs Lonsdale, saying, "I perfectly agree with you in thinking it not right to be on bad terms with one's Lord of the Manor. A clergyman should undoubtedly go hand in hand with his most influential parishioner, if he would set an example of peace and unanimity to his flock, and if he hopes to have his plans for their good carried out with any effect. I did not quarrel with Sir Thomas,—only, on reflection, I think I was wrong to demand as a right what I should have asked as a favour ; for it certainly is not customary here to allow out-door relief."

Mrs Lonsdale laid down the paper, and

looked quite amiable at finding her own sentiment thus approved and enlarged upon, and the credit of it given to herself when it appeared in such an improved form.

“ You are very good to be so ready to blame yourself,” she said, graciously; “ but may I ask why you give yourself so much trouble about old Hodgson? Why should not he go into the Union as well as other people? ”

“ Because it would break his heart.”

“ But every other old man and woman might say the same, and yet they go in, and their hearts do n't break.”

“ What you say is, in strict justice, quite true. There is, perhaps, no more reason for making an effort for poor Hodgson than for any other, though I cannot help feeling for him because of his very sensitive nature. If I had my will, no old person should be shut up in a new and uncongenial place.”

“ But excuse me, my dear Sir, you are a young man, and new to the ways of these

people. I know them very well, and they can't impose upon me. You must not let yourself be too romantic, and get into hot water all about people who, if they had saved as they ought to have done when they were young, would not be shut up when they are old."

"I quite agree with you that a provision for old age should be made in youth, and I am most earnestly inculcating this duty upon every man under my influence. Still I think there are many excuses to be made for those who have not saved, when we consider the difficulty a labouring man with a family has to make the week's wages answer even the week's demands; and this often in full health and strength, and when no casualties occur. When also we consider the improvidence to be met with in all classes, from the nobleman, who often leaves mortgaged estates to his encumbered heir, to the man of moderate fortune, who sometimes throws his children entirely

upon the world, surely we ought to temper our justice with mercy in dealing with the poor."

"But I have always heard that they are very comfortable in those Unions; they are visited very carefully, and have a clergyman and a doctor, and plenty to eat."

"Yes, I have no doubt that they are well attended to. But still, I should like out-door relief to be given to deserving old people. It seems so hard not to allow them to spend their few remaining days in their favourite haunts, in freedom and peace; not to let them bask in the sunshine at the accustomed door, and to indulge the wish of Barzillai, so natural to the old, of being buried by the grave of their father and of their mother, in the familiar church-yard."

"Yes, I dare say it would be better for them if it could be managed, but I don't think people ought to have wishes if they can't afford to pay for them without coming upon other people. I am sure we are doing all we can,

and the rates here are something quite awful, —a little fortune every quarter. Now pray do take my advice, and don't get quarrelling with Sir Thomas about those nasty Poor Laws, for I dare say the Parliament did everything for the best when it passed them."

"Pray be at ease, I have no intention of quarrelling with any one, I assure you; much less with Sir Thomas, who has often a liberal hand, though he has sometimes a hard mouth."

Mr Mordaunt had risen to take leave just before Mrs Lonsdale's last speech, and he seemed to her to loiter a little, as if he hoped that some one else would appear. And now he was glancing earnestly towards the lawn. What could that mean but that he was thinking of Flora, and wishing for her coming—perhaps regretting that his dull talk with Eleanor had driven her away? Well-founded as this idea appeared, it was dispelled when she followed the direction of his eye, and saw a

threatening thunder-cloud lowering in the distance.

“ I think I shall be wise to start at once, if I wish to be at home before the storm comes up,” he said, as he bade adieu to the two ladies. What an opportunity for pressing him to stay to dinner ! Would that she had the power to avail herself of it ; and yet, after all, it was as well for him to go while that fit of deferring to Eleanor’s opinion was upon him. As soon as he had departed, she left the room to prepare for dinner, with a considerable feeling of self-complacency at what she considered the skilful way in which she had interrupted a conversation of a kind which she resolved should not take place again.

Why was it that Eleanor, when thus left alone, sat still and unoccupied ? Why had a feeling of deep and, as it seemed, causeless depression stolen over her ? Surely, as she told herself, it was the heavy atmosphere, charged with the coming storm, that sent a weight

upon her head and a darkness upon her spirit. It could not be, ah, surely it could not be, that Henry Mordaunt's evident disapproval of that one sarcastic look of hers could be really of importance to her, that the serious speech which followed it had wounded her deeply, as meant for a rebuke; she told herself again and again that it could not be.

CHAPTER IV.

"So soft, so delicate, so sweet she came,
Youth's damask glow just dawning on her cheek."

GOLDSMITH.

TUESDAY, the day fixed for the party at the Headingtons', arrived, and it brought with it a pleasant degree of excitement to all at Carstone Rectory. Mr Bromley enjoyed a good dinner and a sociable talk with the gentlemen collected on the rare occasion of a dinner-party from distant parts of the neighbourhood, and Mrs Lonsdale rejoiced in so good an opportunity of showing her pretty daughter, and letting Mr Mordaunt see that there might be

other eyes than his own to appreciate a flower not the less sweet because it seemed doomed to blossom in the shade. Eleanor was fond of society, though she would not go out of her way to seek it; she generally gleaned from it improvement or amusement, or both, and she had a certain degree of self-reliance and innate dignity of character which saved her from the dread and nervousness which are often such drawbacks to the enjoyments of the sunny, hopeful days of youth. She had no expectations of triumph, and no fear of failure, and therefore, as a general rule, she enjoyed herself. Flora, though full of agreeable anticipations, could not help being a little apprehensive, because her mother was so bent upon her looking her very best, and throwing the travelled attractions of the formidable Miss Headington into the shade.

Just before the important time for dressing, as Mrs Lonsdale was carefully fitting on a new pair of white gloves, and just as she had men-

tally brought poor Mr Mordaunt to the very verge of distraction, from jealousy at the attentions of Captain Headington, she saw the groom of that victim of her cruel imagination riding up the avenue with a little basket upon his arm ; she watched him turn round to the back entrance, and then went down-stairs, full of interest to find out what he had brought. If, now, it were a bouquet for Flora, that would indeed be decisive. How attentive he looked, she remembered, when Flora praised those beautiful Provence roses of his, and the lovely double-blossomed myrtle, which she had said never grew so fine anywhere as over his study window at Steyne ; at the bottom of the stairs she met the cook, coming up with a pleased, important face, bearing the little basket. “ What have you got there, cook ? ”

“ Some roses and myrtles, ma’am, as Mr Mordaunt has just sent with his best compliments to the young ladies.”

“ Are you quite sure that the man said the

young ladies, cook? It is always of consequence to be very particular in messages."

"Yes, ma'am, I am as sure as that I am standing here," said cook, rather sturdily; and on she went with her charge, muttering to herself, "I wish he had sent them to one young lady, but not the one you mean, I reckon."

"How are you getting on, my dear? are you nearly ready?" said Mrs Lonsdale, an hour later, tapping at Eleanor's door. Eleanor opened it and admitted her; she was quite dressed, and was employed in untying her bouquet, to add to it a rose, a bud, and two sprigs of the double-blossomed myrtle. She wore a white muslin, very simple in itself, but beautifully made and well put on; Mrs Lonsdale particularly marked how much it showed her slender, rounded waist to advantage, and how much this effect was enhanced by the fall of the full folds of the skirt, a point of great importance to a feminine eye. Eleanor's glossy

dark hair was carefully arranged, and the only ornament she wore was a rich bracelet, the gift of her uncle. Mrs Lonsdale gazed at her from head and foot, and felt herself taken by surprise, as from Eleanor's usually too negligent style of dressing she did not think that she could have made herself look so well.

"What a foolish creature she is," thought she, "not to pay more attention every day to her dress; she should if she were a daughter of mine." Then she said aloud, "My dear, I am come to you in such distress; only think, those gloves that I sent for all the way to Brainbridge this morning have cracked all across the thumb, the first time poor Flora tried to get them on; she is in such a way, poor thing; now do you happen to have a pair that you can let her have, you have both such small hands, exactly the same size, I think?"

"Fortunately I have another pair, quite new, besides those I am going to wear," answered Eleanor, readily, for she was always

glad to help friend or foe out of any trouble, great or small.

"There's a dear, you are such a manager, and never at a loss for anything," exclaimed the well-pleased Mrs Lonsdale.

"I will take them to Flora directly," said Eleanor, "for I am coming to her, as I promised to make up her bouquet again."

Mrs Lonsdale retreated, and carried to Flora the relieving news that the gloves were coming. After which she sat anxiously contemplating her as she proceeded with her toilette.

"I don't know how it is, Flora, but you have not done your hair in half so becoming a manner as you do it other days. Pull it out more this side; no, not that, the side next to me, I mean; there, that will do; but you make it rather too flat; and now I look again I do think one side is longer than the other."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Flora, putting

down her hair again, "I can't do it to-day : it won't come right, and I can't make it. I wish Maria were not such a stupid owl at hair, or I would ring for her."

She was trying again to put it up, her hands trembling with hurry and nervous excitement, when Eleanor, with her air of self-possessed, calm elegance, entered, bringing the promised gloves.

"Oh, Eleanor, how nice you look, and how well you have done your hair!" cried Flora, despairingly, as she turned from the glass, into which she had been looking until even beauty had begun to doubt its own existence from long self-criticism. "I can't do my hair to-day," she added, in a tone as if she were on the point of bursting into tears.

"You have been fatiguing yourself," said Eleanor, kindly ; "sit down, dear, and let me do it — if you will trust me. You liked the way I did it when the Bishop dined here."

“ But you can’t do it with your nice dress on ; I know you can’t.”

“ Yes, I can quite well ; so pray sit down, for we have not much time to spare.”

Even Mrs Lonsdale was satisfied with the effect produced, when Eleanor had quickly and becomingly arranged the rich braids of golden hair entrusted to her ; perhaps, too, the gentle, soothing manner in which the hands performed their office had been of service in calming the nerves of the excited little beauty, for the countenance was improved as well as the hair.

“ What a lovely colour ! ” said Eleanor, looking at the pet green dress, carefully spread out in readiness.

“ I am glad you like it, my dear, as your taste is so good,” said the gratified mother. “ I am sure I am much obliged to you, and so is Flora ; for you have made her look quite like a picture.”

Maria was now summoned, for though, as a hair-dresser, she might deserve the comparison made between herself and the bird of

night, yet in the art of putting on a dress she was unrivalled. With the zest which gives servants a sort of second-hand enjoyment of the gaiety into which their mistresses are about to enter, she now dressed Flora, indulging, in the course of her labours, in various observations expressive of admiration, to be crowned with one great burst of enthusiasm when, having finished her work, she retreated a few steps from the pretty creature whose appearance she had been arranging, to observe the general effect.

“I am sure I can return your compliment now, with interest,” said Eleanor, as she gave Flora the bouquet which had been altered to receive the precious flowers from Steyne. Flora took it with one of her very sweetest smiles, and was so satisfied and pleased with herself that she even condescended to express a fear that Eleanor’s gloves might be too small for her,—an observation met by Mrs Lonsdale and Maria with indignant exclamations, to the effect that no gloves

that could fit any hand could be too small for hers. Eleanor had been acting a kind and soothing part, and none could have done it better. Why, then, was that smile which even *he* had marked for disapproval upon her face when she departed to her own room for the few minutes that yet remained before the carriage would be announced? Yet there it was, for one fleeting moment, and then it passed away, and her head was thrown proudly back, and her whole bearing appeared to raise her above herself, as she felt, "Go forth with all your charms; the field is open, go, win him if you can. He knows me, he has long known and sought me, even as I am, and now, if any attractions can have power to lure him, *let him go*. If a spider's web could detain him, I would not throw it over him. I have been greatly to blame to allow him to gain the slightest influence over one single thought. Of what value is that man's heart who can change or even waver? If he can debate, as I think he has

done, between us,—if he can place me in the balance with any created being, *let him go.*”

Ah pride, pride ! You seem a mighty weapon when we are arming for the battle. Do we esteem you as highly when it is over ?

* * * * *

Mr Bromley, ready dressed, was comfortably reading in his study, when Mrs Lonsdale, with an elated countenance, clad in rich black velvet, with a most becoming head-dress, came in to tell him that the carriage was at the door.

“ But,” she said, “ do come first into the drawing-room and look at Flora. You cannot think how well she looks ; and that bracelet you were so kind as to give her shows off her white arm to *such* advantage. I can’t think what young Headington, who, of course, saw nothing but savages at the Cape, will feel when he sees her ! ”

“ Is Flora only to shine by the contrast ? ” answered Mr Bromley, smiling in his good-natured way, as he rose to accompany her.

Flora was standing in the middle of the room, certainly looking very charming in the green dress which so few could wear, and to which her snowy neck and shoulders, just tinged with the delicate glow of health, formed the prettiest contrast ; the bright blue eyes, the sunny hair so tastefully braided, the features exulting, and yet softened with the light of conscious beauty, might well have tempted any eye not only to gaze, but to rest well satisfied with what it looked upon. Mr Bromley promptly produced the pretty speech he deemed expected from him, and the smiling Flora looked yet brighter than before. Then his eye turned upon that white-robed figure, so calm and still, half-shadowed by the window curtains.

“Why, Nelly, what has come over you? for you remind me of a painting I once saw of Sophonisba, looking as if she would like to see the Roman who had any intention of chaining her to his chariot wheels.”

With a light step Eleanor came forward and

joined him, and the mood, whatever it was, which had been upon her immediately passed away.

“Take care of your dress, child; dear me, what are you about?” exclaimed Mrs Lonsdale, as Flora seated herself in the carriage, without having bestowed any of the care which the initiated in visiting give almost unconsciously to their dresses, on the silk which was intended to excite such admiration in Captain Headington, and to fix, beyond recall, the wavering heart of Mr Mordaunt.

It seemed strange to Flora to hear Mr Bromley and Eleanor composedly discussing a case of poisoning which they had read in the morning’s paper, and then diverge to the promising harvest. How could people at such a time think of anything but the all-absorbing dinner-party? What could make Eleanor think so little about it? She supposed it must be because she had been living in Bath. Then she represented Miss Headington to herself, dressed in every possible

manner, and looking, she feared, more fashionable than herself; then she dreaded the time when she should be asked to sing,—would she be able to bring out a note? What was Captain Headington like?—did he wear a moustache? and was he as handsome as Henry Mordaunt? No, of course not, nobody could be. Would Henry Mordaunt lead her down to dinner? and what should she do if he did not?

“Flora, my love, don’t look so lost in thought. You should be as cheerful as possible before going into company, it lights up the face so much better,” observed Mrs Lonsdale.

“What are you disturbed about?” said Mr Bromley, laughing. “Are you afraid that the venison will be served upon plates full of lukewarm water, for if so, you are not fearful without reason, for last year I really was ashamed of meeting with negligence of this kind in an establishment like Sir Thomas’s.”

“Oh, uncle! as if I cared about venison.” The observation called back the smile which

her mother considered of so much importance ; and then, as her anticipations about the party brightened, she began to think the drive a great deal too long. But when at length they approached the great gates through which they must enter the domain of the Headingtons, those gates which, when they first appeared, had been denounced as too heavy, and too large, out of proportion, and in bad taste, by a criticizing neighbourhood, she felt a nervous consciousness that they were coming upon the scene of action much too soon.

CHAPTER V.

“Il n’y a rien qui réussit comme le succès.”

TALLEYRAND.

SIR THOMAS HEADINGTON was the son of a man into whose genealogy it is not necessary to inquire ; one who, by industry and peculiar success in whatever he undertook, had ascended to a certain height on the ladder of fortune, leaving his son, partly by following his example, and more by lucky speculation, to mount still higher. Fortunately wealth had come early enough to the elder Headington to enable him to give his son an education which, if not exactly a liberal one, made him pass muster in

society, and saved him from that inward consciousness of inferiority which has often made a position laboriously attained more a bane than a blessing.

On coming into his fortune on the death of his father, Sir Thomas had wisely moved at once into a new neighbourhood, and he became the purchaser of a large tract of land, including nearly the whole parishes of Steyne and Hartley, part of Carstone, and enough of Brainbridge to send him without opposition to Parliament, spite of any body inclined to make an outcry about close boroughs. On the property thus acquired he had built an entirely new mansion, about which could cling no old associations of a family superior to his own : no legends professing to extend to the dark ages of belted knight or lovely dame, of a race so time-honoured as to sink the man of to-day into insignificance. No visitor to his house should curiously eye heraldic bearings not belonging to its present

owner, carved in stone over mullioned window, or investing even coach-house or stables with the shadowy glory of the past. No, Sir Thomas was a wise man, and he determined that he would not be taunted under his own roof by any impertinent reminiscences; and therefore in the newest style of architecture rose Cranberry Hall, in the finely-wooded parish of Steyne. All that money could procure was bestowed upon its erection; finely proportioned and fair to view was it from without, and furnished in the most costly manner within, with every improvement that modern science could afford for comfort or luxury.

When Sir Thomas and Lady Headington first appeared in the county, now some twenty years ago, the neighbouring Squires, who piqued themselves on their family, did not seem inclined to admit the claims of the man who never had a grandfather; the man who had got his money by calico-printing, or in a

tea-warehouse, or nobody could tell how ; and at this time his house was as often called Mushroom Castle as Cranberry Hall ; and everything he did was denounced as showing ostentation or vulgarity. It was not long, however, before that mighty overpowering reality, wealth, a thing to be seen, and felt, and tasted, first worked its way, and then began to carry all before it. It dawned upon the minds of many that a grandfather is, after all, not such an indispensable relative as he was fifty, thirty, or even twenty years ago. We live in an age of progress, and the man who climbs is allowed to stand on the height where he has placed himself. Those too who had cavilled—because poor Sir Thomas had not received his *accolade* precisely as the gallant Bayard would have given it—began to understand that it is better to be knighted even for carrying up an address than not to be knighted at all ; and so by degrees Sir Thomas became the first man of his neighbourhood ; though two or three

Squires of small incomes and high pretensions harmlessly retained the mental reservation, that in reality nothing could ever make him as good as they were.

In all the country round there was not a man more liked and respected by Sir Thomas than the urbane Rector of Carstone, who, without waiting for him even to take root in his newly-acquired soil, had readily accorded him the position to which he considered a great landed proprietor entitled—and this he did at once, spite of the fretting, and fuming, and heart-burnings of his old friend, Jasper Hollowdean, Esq., of Hollowdean, whose ancestors had held that estate from the time of James the First; and who, when he came to Carstone, on purpose to use many fiery arguments to induce Mr Bromley, at least, to be backward in his civilities, found him

“Soft as the wave, unshaken as the rock.”

A second Jasper Hollowdean had now suc-

ceeded the first ; and the father's notions on most points had been inherited by his son.

After the party from Carstone had passed through the gates of Cranberry Park, they slackened their pace, to ascend the hill which led to the Hall. As they leaned out to take a survey of the scene, they saw Mr Hollowdean before them, walking by the side of his gig. He stopped when he perceived that they were behind ; and, resigning the reins to a rough-looking youth in shabby livery, he waited for his friends to come up to him.

Mr Hollowdean was a fiery-looking little man, short and thick-set, with bristling hair, which disdained to submit to the softening influence of oil or *pommade*. He had the appearance of a man who was constantly expecting some one to offend him, and who was prepared to punish the offender in a very summary manner. Having given the party a general greeting, he walked by the carriage, on the side where Eleanor sat, for she was a

favourite with him, so much so, that had not all his tastes, habits, and opinions marked him down for a determined bachelor, the public would have supposed it possible that he might honour her with an offer of his hand, backed by the acres that had been in the possession of his family for such a respectable time.

"I say," observed he, "what a bore it is to have to pull one's carriages up such a hill as this! I do wonder, that I do, that Headington, with all his money, had n't the sense to make a more winding road."

"He could scarcely do it," returned Eleanor, "because his house stands upon such an eminence. And you are quite rewarded for a little trouble in the ascent, when you see the view from the summit of the hill."

"What do you know about road-making, Miss Stuart? I say that if I had the place, I'd manage to make a road that people could drive along without thinking that they were going to the top of Mont Blanc to get their

dinner. Why, poor old Mr Burton, the hypochondriac, never will come up this hill, for fear he should go down it backwards, with the carriage before the horses."

"If the world were to be made to suit hypochondriacs, we should have to alter a great many more things than Sir Thomas Headington's road," said Eleanor, smiling.

"Oh, that's right," said Mr Hollowdean, taking out a large silk handkerchief, and vehemently beating the dust from his boots; "of course you defend the Headingtons—everybody does. Let a man only get money, no matter how, and he may turn every woman's head in the country."

"How is your clever little nephew getting on at his new school?" asked Mr Bromley, anxious to give the conversation a more agreeable turn.

"Oh, famously, thank you, famously. He will be a worthy Hollowdean, he will; quite a chip of the good old block. Having such a

fine fellow as that to succeed one, makes one give up all thoughts of marrying," and he glanced fiercely at Eleanor, as if expecting such an announcement to have an overwhelming effect.

"You must be proud of him; he promises to be a very fine boy," said Eleanor, tranquilly.

"Here we are; halloo, stop!" shouted the piqued Squire to his groom, anticipating a little the top of the hill; and jumping into his light vehicle, he showed his horse's mettle along the smooth drive, and arrived some little time before the rest of the party at the hall door.

"Is my hair smooth?" whispered the agitated Flora to Eleanor, as they ascended the stairs, before being announced.

"Yes, quite," returned Eleanor, a little contemptuously, for she had some sympathy with Mr Hollowdean, and was, therefore, rather annoyed with Flora for being so very nervous about this dinner at the Headingtons.

On entering the drawing-room, they were received with a sort of pompous cordiality by Sir Thomas, who was a stout man of middle height, whose very coat looked proud of what it had cost, and who moved about as if he supposed that his slightest action must be a matter of importance. He was proud of wealth; he felt its power. This could easily be seen, and as easy would it be to notice in his character and in his manners many a salient point for ridicule. But look deeper, you, with the charitable hearts loving all men; you who try to look on others as you trust good angels look on you; and you will find in Sir Thomas Headington much sterling good, which the keenly criticizing eye, penetrating as it supposes itself, is not acute enough to discover.

In the most comfortable corner of the easiest of her sofas was seated the indolent Lady Headington, a useless, harmless, inoffensive sort of person, who was supposed to be passing through life without having ever made a friend or an

enemy. Many of her duties as mistress of the house she willingly resigned to her daughter, a young lady as full of spirit as her mother was deficient in it. Miss Headington inherited her father's sense of importance, and both in dress and manner she was a person who could not, even for a short time, be overlooked. Her pretensions to beauty were very small, but she gave herself so much the air of a popular *belle*, that many, against the evidence of their own eyes, would allow her the distinction she assigned to herself. She made people attentive whether they intended to be so or not, and in consequence, while many a genuine beauty had been, for a time, thrown into the shade, she had never been neglected in her life. Her father was excessively proud of her, and she made a much better daughter than some who make a fairer show of feminine gentleness before the world.

Captain Headington, a fine-looking young man, but whose appearance was spoiled and

made heavy by a considerable portion of his mother's inertness, was lounging on a low easy chair, which it struck the eye as strange that he had not resigned in favour of a delicate-looking pale girl by his side, with colourless lips, eyes of a faded blue, and hair of that shade of flaxen which approaches the nearest to white. He was talking to her, or, more strictly speaking, replying occasionally to what she was saying to him, for he looked as if he thought there was more trouble in conversation than in fighting with the Kaffres. Besides the ladies already mentioned, the only other present was a sad, timid-looking elderly lady, a Mrs Griffith, widow of the late Rector of Steyne, who now rented a small cottage near her former home, where she resided with her son, an intelligent youth of about seventeen, who was now sitting by her side, not talking to any one. Two or three gentlemen of the neighbourhood were scattered about the room, amongst whom was Mr Hollowdean, who,

with his feet planted firmly and independently on the hearth-rug, was giving Lady Headington a vivid and minute description of the way in which he had succeeded in destroying all the rats that had infested his out-houses in his father's time, ay, and in his grandfather's too ; and this he was doing in a voice so loud as to make the poor lady doubt whether her nerves would not break down before the evening was over. The entrance of the Carstone party seemed an event of interest to all present. Mr Bromley received the sort of greeting which at once shows a stranger that a man is popular and respected in his neighbourhood. Miss Headington gave a very prolonged look at Flora, and Mrs Lonsdale was languidly motioned by Lady Headington to take part of her sofa, while she fervently hoped that the new arrival would cause a sufficient diversion to remove from her vicinity the noisy Squire of Hollowdean.

Mrs Lonsdale could with difficulty respond

to her hostess's faint attempts at conversation, for her eye had quickly taken in all the occupants of the room; and amongst them Mr Mordaunt was not. After a few minutes of disquietude she was relieved by Sir Thomas coming to his wife and saying :

“ Well, my dear, what do you think ? shall we give him any more grace ? ”

“ Not a minute more, if I were you ; not one minute more ! ” exclaimed Mr Hollowdean, who never had any objection to give his opinion whether asked for it or not.

“ Surely you will wait a little longer for the Rector of the place, papa,” said Miss Headington, who invariably opposed the Squire of Hollowdean when he laid down the law in her presence.

“ What, Miss Headington, are you turned Puseyite ? and do you think your dinner will do you no good unless it is blessed by the parson of the parish ? ”

“ I presume,” she replied, “ that we are not

a pack of hungry hounds, and therefore we need not rush upon our food without waiting for a gentleman who happens to be five minutes behind his time."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Mr Hollowdean, "not so bad that; there is nothing like a woman's wit to put a man down," he added, addressing poor Lady Headington, in a tone that seemed to take a direct way through her head, giving her a confused kind of idea that, if wit could have that power over him, it must be a more valuable thing than she had been in the habit of supposing it.

At this moment, to the great relief of Mr Bromley, who was talking in the most agreeable manner to his next neighbour, with the vision of a spoiled dinner before his inward eye, Mr Mordaunt was announced. He made some apology to Sir Thomas, which was not generally heard, and then with quiet ease took his station by Lady Headington, who showed vague symptoms of having something par-

ticular to say to him. Mrs Lonsdale had hoped that, under the influence of irresistible fascination, he would at once have availed himself of the happy chance of a vacant chair next Flora; and have so obviously devoted himself to her, as to leave Lady Headington no choice but to tell him to take her down to dinner. Instead of this, he, in the most matter-of-fact manner, seemed to think that the mistress of the house had a prior right to his attentions, if she chose to require them; and there was Flora, so brightly blooming, with nobody near her but business-like Mr Broughton of Brainbridge, who had begun to talk to her about the last agricultural meeting. Of course a beauty could not be expected to give any heed to such a subject as that, so Flora gave her attention to her bouquet as the most congenial object at hand. At last that announcement, which country gentlemen in general await with what appears to those of a more ethereal mould a most undue share of

anxiety, was made. Mrs Lonsdale scarcely saw that the important arm of Sir Thomas was offered to her, so great was her desire to find out whether a lucky chance would send Mr Mordaunt to her daughter's side. No time was allowed for the discovery, and down she was led by her consequential host ; being obliged to leave events that were going on behind her, dark and uncontrolled, to an issue, to be seen only when she should be able, from her seat of honour, to take a survey of how every guest was placed at the table. Poor Mrs Lonsdale ! the first observation made by those inquisitive eyes of hers was, that Miss Headington, like a skilful tactician, as she was, had secured to herself the handsomest and most agreeable of the gentlemen present ; and there she was, in full view, at the other end of the table, using all the artillery of her vivacious conversation upon Mr Mordaunt. Flora had fallen a victim to that odious Mr Broughton, and was seated between him and

Captain Headington ; who, when he showed any sign of animation, bestowed it upon the pale girl still by his side. Eleanor was placed between Mr Hollowdean and an elderly gentleman, who was concentrating all his energies upon his dinner. After the first feeling of disappointment had passed away, Mrs Lonsdale took comfort from the thought that Eleanor was no better situated than Flora ; nay, not so well, for to the latter was accorded the desired opportunity for making Mr Mordaunt jealous. It was not long, however, before it became evident to the anxious mother that the man whose jealousy could be excited by the means she had devised, must be a prey to that baleful passion to a very extraordinary degree ; for Captain Headington went on with his dinner in a very lazy manner, said no more than he was obliged to say, and frequently called for bitter ale, to assuage a thirst brought on (so his mother told Mr Bromley) by his arduous services in Kaffraria. Sir Thomas at last

succeeded in turning Mrs Lonsdale's thoughts from her own private anxieties, by beginning to expatiate on the hardness of the times, and the high price of provisions, in a way which, from a man of his income, was quite overwhelming ; so that timid, fearful Mrs Griffith felt herself a great deal poorer than before.

Mr Broughton, who had been eagerly watching for an opportunity of addressing some other person than his pretty inattentive neighbour, exclaimed :

" Why, Sir Thomas, if *you* begin talking of hard times, what is to become of other people ? "

" Just the fish he has been angling for," said Mr Hollowdean, in a low tone to Eleanor.

" And do n't you think," replied Sir Thomas, setting down his empty champagne glass, " that this burdensome income-tax is enough to make every man look about him ? Why, you reckon upon having so much, and you suddenly find that you have so much less. Now I want to know who is to stand that ? "

"I only wish I had as much of this burdensome tax to pay as you have, that's all; ha, ha, ha," returned Mr Broughton, looking in vain into the face of the lovely Flora for appreciation of what he considered a very fair joke.

"I am not against direct taxation myself," said the Squire of Hollowdean. "If public money is wanted, why, it seems fair enough to have to put one's hand into one's pocket, and pull it out at once, like a man, instead of being cheated into doing it, without being aware of it. But it is curious how opinions in a family change; now my ancestor, Robert Hollowdean, who sat in the Long Parliament, was a most determined enemy of the tax direct. He was a sort of man to make the Court party shake in their shoes a bit. Still he was loyal to the back-bone, was stout Robert Hollowdean; and when it came to fighting, no man dealt a better blow for King Charles than he. But he was treated very ungratefully by the Government

after the Restoration; and I have heard it hinted that, before his death, he was hand and glove with Sir Philip Sidney. Hey, hey," said the good Squire, in an under tone, "what's the matter now?" for he caught a quiet smile on Eleanor's demure mouth.

"Why did you bring in Sir Philip Sidney?" she said in the same tone.

"Hey, hey—why not?—why not?"

"Because he died years before—Algernon Sidney you must mean."

"What was I saying?" he added aloud, and much louder than before. "Yes, strange to say, after all, he was hand and glove with such a man as *Algernon Sidney*. Thank you, thank you, Miss Stuart," he said, lower. "You are always a friend in need; and, I'd bet anything, as true as my old encyclopedia. I say, was n't that pretty fairly done? Let Jasper Hollowdean alone for recovering scent."

"I certainly think," said Eleanor, "that

it is more difficult to recover oneself than always to go on correctly."

"True, true ; you speak like a book."

Poor Flora began to feel the dinner insupportably tedious, as she sat drawing comparisons between Henry Mordaunt and Captain Headington, not very favourable to the latter. At last, thinking she must find something to say, she timidly addressed her heavy companion. "Did you see much of the Ojibbeways when you were at the Cape ?"

"Much of the *what !*" exclaimed he, opening his fine black eyes very wide. "There are no Ojibbeways there ; Kaffres I suppose you mean."

But the question had roused him more than the cleverest observation could have done, and as his own stock of information was not large, he was pleased to meet with one to whom he could impart what he knew. He, therefore, proceeded very graciously to tell Flora all about the land he had just left, and when once

he had taken the trouble to answer her, he perceived what a very pretty face he had been overlooking so long. Mrs Lonsdale now began to cheer herself with the thought that Mr Mordaunt's uneasiness must be commencing; alas, this pleasing idea soon vanished, for there he was, still engrossed by the rattling Miss Headington, who was running with astonishing rapidity from the Bay of Naples to the Carnival at Rome and anecdotes of Pio Nono,—then to the Baths of Lucca,—then to the ascent of Mont Blanc,—and then off to the Valhalla, and up the Rhine, and to those dear pet paintings at Antwerp, &c. The velocity of her ideas almost made Mrs Lonsdale's head ache, and Mr Mordaunt, instead of being bored, as a man in love ought to be, by all this, was actually entering with great interest into her descriptions of the scenes which he had also visited. It was not long before Captain Headington relapsed into a state of mental torpor. The Kaffres had been exhausted, and no new

topic had been supplied. What could Flora be thinking of, stupid girl? When once she had interested him, why did she not exert herself to keep up her advantage? While angry with Flora for her silence, Mrs Lonsdale was still more annoyed to perceive how well Eleanor was getting on, in what she had considered her unpromising situation, for she was alternately carrying on a lively conversation with Mr Hollowdean, taking care to keep him in check when he seemed inclined to be boisterous; and then bringing out the latent powers of her other neighbour, who, now that the dessert had been placed upon the table, had leisure to find out that, for a lady, Miss Stuart was very agreeable indeed. This dessert was a great trial to Mrs Lonsdale, for Miss Headington made Mr Mordaunt peel her a peach, then a pear, and ended by getting him to crack for her a plateful of fine filberts, services which he performed a great deal too willingly, and every fresh crack gave a jar to the poor

watchful lady's nerves. How much she would have given to be able to make herself a believer in Mr Bromley's persuasion that a man's affections are not to be taken from him by force or stratagem.

"Have you heard," said Sir Thomas, addressing Mr Bromley, "of the strange change in the Mountjoy family?"

"I have heard nothing more than the death of poor Sir Richard, which I saw in the *Times* yesterday."

"That is not all," said Miss Headington. "I had a letter from Naples this morning, containing the distressing news that both Sir Richard's sons had been accidentally drowned when out boating. Is it not shocking?—all three cut off in such a short time; and the sons were such fine young men, and the eldest was just going to be married to Lord Cranstoun's eldest daughter; the girl you know who is sole heiress to the Ferney Estates. Such a match!—so desirable in every way, and they

would have been such a handsome couple. The youngest was such a delightful creature, quite an ally of mine. I met him at the Baths of Lucca. Really I was so shocked at the news that I have scarcely been myself since I heard it."

"How very shocking! how very sad!" exclaimed Mr Bromley, and the exclamation was echoed round the table.

"Ah, to be sure, very sad indeed," said Mr Hollowdean; "and the worst part of the matter is that there goes a fine old baronetage, slap bang, for there were only two sons to keep up the title."

"How sad, how very sad," sighed Lady Headington, faintly.

"You are mistaken in thinking the title extinct," said Mr Bromley. "It goes to that poor neglected boy Allan, the son of a brother of Sir Richard, who married so much beneath him that his family never would receive him."

"And what became of the boy then?" asked Mr Hollowdean.

"After the death of his parents, he was taken in at Mountjoy Castle as a sort of poor dependent, and his relationship was barely recognised."

"Is he not a bit—? at least, so I have heard," said Sir Thomas, ominously tapping his forehead.

"He is not at all deficient in natural abilities," exclaimed Eleanor, warmly; "but if the most careful nurture often fails to make a man what he ought to be, what can be expected from cruel neglect?"

"Did you know him then?" inquired Mr Mordaunt, looking, Mrs Lonsdale feared, with interest at the indignant flush upon her speaking countenance.

"Yes, I used to know him very well as a boy, for my father had the living of the parish in which Mountjoy Castle is situated. He very much disapproved of the way in

which the poor boy was treated, and sometimes had him to read with him."

"What," laughed Sir Thomas, good-humouredly, "are you the little girl who, tradition says, insisted on washing poor little Allan's face at the pump-stone, as you cried and said a gentleman was a gentleman, however people might treat him?"

The fastidious Eleanor blushed painfully at this public mention of so strange an anecdote of her childish days.

"Dear me!" cried Miss Headington, "how very interesting! And now that the fairies have been to work, and turned a dirty little boy into a rich baronet, Sir Allan Mountjoy can, in common gratitude, do no less than lay his fortune at your feet, and add a pump-handle to his armorial bearings. As for education, that is not of the slightest consequence in a man of his family, is it, Mr Hollowdean?" and she smiled mischievously at him.

Eleanor's colour had deepened during this

speech, and she made no reply. Mr Mor-daunt said a few words in a low tone to Miss Headington, and she became quiet, and bent down over her filberts.

“ Well, Miss Headington, you may say what you like,” retorted Mr Hollowdean, “ but, for my part, educated or not educated, I am extremely glad to find that there is an heir. Good old families should be kept up, for they, as Goldsmith finely says,”—here he elevated his voice to give due effect to his words—

“ ‘ When once destroy’d, can never be supplied.’

“ What have I done now? You are enough to drive a man mad, you are!” he added in his under tone—for Eleanor had, by this time, recovered herself, and that tormenting smile of hers was again upon her face.

“ Do n’t be alarmed. You have only done what many a man has done before you—twisted a quotation a little bit to suit your own views.”

“ How, how? what, what?” inquired the

alarmed Squire; but before he could get an answer the ladies had risen in obedience to Lady Headington's summons, and departed from the dining-room.

CHAPTER VI.

“Elle affecte une nonchalance dans son parler et dans ses actions.”—*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.

A PLEASANT room was the drawing-room at Cranberry Hall ! and though it was furnished with every appliance of modern luxury, there was nothing in all its evidences of wealth to weigh down the wearied or poverty-stricken spirit. It was probable that the light effect and general air of this apartment, in which it differed from the other parts of the house, was owing to the cheerful character of its young mistress, who would admit nothing gloomy or forbidding in any place which she

frequented. Far too sociable was she to shut herself up in *boudoir*, or morning room, or secluded library, even for the first precious hours of the day, and therefore the drawing-room, as the most accessible spot either to those in the house or likely to come to it, was peculiarly her domain. Here she collected her music, her work, and such books as she could induce herself to read when no fortunate interruption saved her from resigning herself to so sedentary an employment. In this accommodating room the ladies, who had left the dinner table, soon seated themselves in a way to suit their different notions of the agreeable. Lady Headington sank into the same comfortable place which she had occupied before dinner, having in her near vicinity Mrs Griffith and Mrs Lonsdale, and allowing the burden of conversation to rest upon the latter, who, when thus depended upon, was not found wanting. The pale girl sat down with an air of fatigue, at a little distance from

the elder ladies, and Flora quietly placed herself beside her. She was in a silent mood ; and, while her mother talked incessantly of whatever first came into her head, she continued still and abstracted, thinking over the dinner, which to her had been such a sad, sad failure ; depreciating her own attractions as compared with those of Miss Headington, and painfully fearing that Henry Mordaunt only sought her on other occasions because she was newer to him than Eleanor, and that he was only too ready to forsake her when attracted by any fresh rival. Would he be one of the gentlemen to come early to the drawing-room, and, if so, would he come to her or to Miss Headington ? And what else did she not think, that a jealous fancy could suggest ? Poor girl ! she had been too soon taught to regard as certain that which was not yet so ; and, therefore, was she a prey to fears which should be chased from every delicate womanly mind, as carefully as we remove the

blight from the tender opening bud. She looked at the tedious hand of the *pendule*, which, because its motion was noiseless, appeared not to move at all. Would the coffee ever come—would the tea ever come—would the gentlemen ever come? That was her one idea, and she was well pleased that the girl near her seemed as weary and as little disposed to talk as herself.

Tempted by the fragrant odour of flowers and sweetly-scented shrubs wafted upwards from the pleasure-grounds, Eleanor went to one of the open windows and looked out, with a soothing sensation of pleasure, at the evening scene before her. But if she were bent upon enjoying it for a few moments alone, she was not to be allowed any such unsociable indulgence. Miss Headington tripped lightly up to her.

“Come and sit by me,” she said gaily, “and don’t stand there singing to yourself, ‘How beautiful is night.’ Here, this will do,” and

she pointed to a couch with a luxurious low chair close to it, and taking the couch first herself, in an unceremonious manner, she motioned Eleanor to the chair, saying, "Take that, you are just the figure to look well upon a low seat."

Eleanor smiled and obeyed.

"We are just nicely placed," said her lively companion. "We are near enough to the rest to join, if necessary, in general conversation, and we are far enough removed to say, if we choose, anything we do not wish to have overheard."

"For such a double purpose, nothing could be better arranged," replied Eleanor.

"I say, you are a capital girl for a dinner party, and you made the most of your materials, which everybody knows is good generalship. You used the curb to Mr Hollowdean, and the spur to Mr Jennings, in a way that took my fancy amazingly, though I dare say you thought I was too well employed to take any notice."

"No, I did not think that," returned Eleanor,

“for I supposed you too much of an adept in society to allow yourself to be absorbed.”

“You are pretty right there, as no doubt you are in most of your notions,” said Miss Headington, who praised herself and her friends with equal readiness. “What a pretty girl Miss Lonsdale is,” she added; “but about her, one feels inclined to put the same question always asked when a baby, big enough to justify it, is introduced, ‘Can she speak, nurse?’”

“You must speak of my relations to me as you would speak of myself,” said Eleanor gravely.

“I meant no harm, I assure you,” said Miss Headington frankly, “so you must forgive me. I thought it was a sort of law of nature for cousins to hate each other, beginning by quarrelling and scratching each other in the nursery, and then, when they grow up, becoming, as a matter of course, rivals in love.”

Why did Eleanor turn aside her face, that the scanning mischievous eyes should not look

into it so closely ? Miss Headington mistook the movement.

“ There now,” she said, “ you are really annoyed with me, but pray be friends, nobody is ever angry with me, I am such a poor thoughtless creature. Why do you smile ? ” she continued, as Eleanor, immediately recovering herself, had turned towards her.

“ Because it is a kind of contradiction for people to say that they know they are thoughtless. If you know it so well, you are not so in reality.”

“ And therefore I ought to cure myself, you would say. Well, you are an alarming creature to talk to, certainly, but I like you all the better for speaking the truth. I never hear it from a man, and if I did not get a little from my own sex, I should grow worse than I am.”

“ And that is a state which few of us could afford to fall into,” said Eleanor, smiling.

“ You are rather severe upon the world in general,” returned Miss Headington, a little

disappointed at not receiving the compliments generally paid to her after any attempt at self-disparagement. "Is it your disposition to be so very truthful?"

"You must find that out for yourself. My uncle says that one of the surest receipts for becoming a bore is to talk of oneself."

"What a strange, disagreeable creature you are, and as hard to talk with as poor dear Alfred Mountjoy's kicking black mare was to ride, but I like you amazingly. If you won't talk about yourself then, you shall tell me all about Mr Hollowdean, because they say that you are the only lady he has ever been known to prefer to a dog or a ferret. Now I want to know whether you intend to consent to be 'a little dearer than his horse,' or something that Tennyson or somebody says, for I have the most shocking memory for poetry that ever was."

"I never give myself unnecessary trouble, and to decide how to answer a man who has

never proposed, certainly comes under that head."

"Well, you are cautious enough for a witness-box, upon my word; now I am quite different. I do n't in the least bit mind telling about anything. Now you must know that I think Mr Hollowdean very delightfully detestable. He took a great dislike to me the first minute he saw me, and I was so glad of it, for it is so amusing to be hated by a man like that. I really do n't know what I should have done without him last November, for he used to call on those horrid foggy days, and we never agreed about one single thing. A man who can't argue without getting into a passion is invaluable in such weather. Really if you give up Mr Hollowdean, I have half a mind to take him myself."

"Do, for if you can stand bad temper and bad weather united, you can do far more than I can."

"Now we have disposed of him, then do let

me know what sort of a man Mr Mordaunt is upon further acquaintance, for I hear that he is as intimate as can be at Carstone Rectory. Ah! you need not look surprised; I am never in a neighbourhood two days before I manage to know all about it. You would be astonished how quick I am in finding things out. Mr Mordaunt is very good, and very clever, and very everything, is he not?"

"Yes, I believe so," replied Eleanor, scarcely knowing what she said.

"His acquaintance will be the greatest possible acquisition to me, but it is a positive misfortune to you and Miss Lonsdale."

"How can that be?"

"Why, as I am only here for a short time, the society of such a superior man will be everything to me. I shall be charmed, and, it is to be hoped, improved by his conversation. I shall be always asking his advice, and following it if it suits me; and I shall be sure to give double my usual subscriptions to the charities,

because a handsome young Rector comes to ask for them. All this will be delightful, and then, when I go away, I shall lay him by, as I do my furs, till I want him again. But for girls who are resident here, what can they do but lose their hearts to him irrevocably, and give each other laurel water or something of that sort? A man like him, who has any conscience, really ought not to settle himself down where he has only such men as Messrs Hollowdean, Broughton, and Co., to rival him; he cannot tell what he may have to answer for."

Eleanor smiled faintly in answer to this sally; she felt quite angry with herself for being so ill at ease, and a vague sensation of depression stole over her; she did not ask herself why it came, because she was too proud to acknowledge to herself that it existed. The time when we refuse to analyze our feelings is often that when they most require it. One effort, and she recovered that self-command which a proud nature chooses for its armour.

of proof, and she said lightly, "What a charitable thing it would be for you to use your influence to remove such a dangerous man. Could you not get him a bishopric, a deanery, or even a better living?"

Having said this, she glanced towards the sofa, impelled by the consciousness which makes us aware when an inquisitive gaze is upon us. She met the eyes of Mrs Lonsdale looking as if they would pierce her through, for, after the first mention of Mr Mordaunt's name, her attention had been acutely alive to every word that Miss Headington had uttered.

To escape from the broadsides of speeches on the one side and suspicious looks on the other, Eleanor made a sudden request to Miss Headington for a little music.

"Oh! you don't care about music, I am sure, till the gentlemen come up," replied she. "Pray say no more about it, lest some matron, who must not be denied, should second the mo-

tion ; we are so snug and comfortable now, and men, when they appear, will expect to be amused, poor sillies."

" You were speaking of Mr Mordaunt," said Mrs Lonsdale, in a very audible voice, seeming to convey the fact that she had overheard all that had been said ; " you know him very well, I suppose ? "

" I never saw him before to-day," answered Miss Headington. " You know he has not long had the living, and he was away when we were here last autumn, or at least when I was, for I am never long in one place, and last year I had a whole host of visits to pay."

Mrs Lonsdale was not rendered more gracious by this full reply, but sat very upright, with her lips drawn in very tight, an attitude intended to express some surprise at the quick growth of Miss Headington's friendships.

Mrs Lonsdale's serenity having been disturbed, she was not able to make herself so agreeable as before to the two depending upon

her for the suggestion of every fresh topic. Having a kind of sleepy consciousness that conversation was flagging, Lady Headington observed that she found with herself that very warm weather took away powers of every kind; and, in fact, she considered that to exist at all is as much as can be expected from any one at such a season.

“Oh! mamma,” exclaimed Miss Headington, “you would have thought that the reapers had something more to do than that, if you had seen them working at three o’clock this afternoon in Atherton Close, where there is not the ghost of a tree or even a hedge to shelter them, nothing but a merciless white, burning stone wall.”

“My dear, they are brought up to it.”

“How kind Mr Mordaunt is to the labouring men,” said Mrs Griffith. “He makes them rest in the hottest part of the day when they are working for him.”

“I have no doubt that he is a pattern of

everything that is good," exclaimed Miss Headington, enthusiastically.

Mrs Lonsdale wished that the tea she was drinking would scald her.

At that moment the sound of footsteps was heard ascending the stairs, and the door opening admitted Mr Mordaunt and Alfred Griffith. Eleanor noticed that in the widow's eye gleamed a soft bright light, at seeing the friendly companionship in which the two entered.

"Welcome," said Miss Headington. "Welcome, you two gallant ones. I felt sure you would be the first to have the good taste to come to us."

Though the words were addressed to both, she looked at Mr Mordaunt, who, as politeness required, approached her to ask her reason for so flattering an opinion; and soon, to Mrs Lonsdale's infinite chagrin, he was seated between her and Eleanor; and then was continued the lively conversation of the dinner table. This was bad enough, but what was

still worse was, that Mr Mordaunt often turned from the light argument in which his gay new friend engaged him to appeal to Eleanor's opinion. Poor Flora, who sat bitterly regretting the appearance she had a few minutes before so much desired, gave Alfred Griffith's attempts to discuss with her the different merits of chess, backgammon, and draughts, such cold encouragement, that he soon deserted her to take the other place by Eleanor. "What a stupid creature she is," thought her irritated mother. "Why did she not get up a little flirtation with him? Young as he is — he would have been better than nobody, to alarm that insultingly secure Henry Mordaunt."

"My dear," said Lady Headington to the pale girl who had been making occasional efforts to talk to Flora, and who now leaned back in her chair, looking quite exhausted, "do let me advise you to go to bed. I am sure that sick headache of yours is worse than ever—

Laura, my dear, do n't you think she had better go to bed?"

"Do, love," said Miss Headington, compassionately.

"I really am grateful to you for the permission," said the pale girl, "for my head is now so bad that I can scarcely see—I am sure you will kindly excuse me," she added to the company generally, as she rose, and, with a quiet, unobtrusive grace of manner, left the room.

"Poor thing! how ill she looks," said Mrs Lonsdale. "Who is she? I do n't think I have ever met her before."

"She is Lady Anastasia Gordon, daughter of Lord Kirkpatrick, and I beg you will all think her excessively interesting," said Miss Headington; "for she has the honour to be my intended sister-in-law—though it is a great distress of mind to me to think how my brother and she will get on together without falling into the same stagnant condition as Mr Hollowdean's duck pond. I never in all

my life knew two people fall into such a mistake as they did when they took a fancy to one another."

"My dear, my dear!" said Lady Headington, apprehensively.

"Mamma, I don't mean any harm, I love them both dearly, but still I maintain that they made a mistake in coming together. Augustus ought to have chosen a woman who would have thrown a little tartaric acid into his soda and made it effervesce a bit; and Anastasia ought to have had Hollowdean of Hollowdean, or one of his genus, who would have made her head ache so thoroughly before breakfast, that she would have been grateful for quiet all the morning after, and as, when he was with her, she would be always wishing him away, and when he was away, she would be always dreading his coming, so hope and fear between them would keep her constantly alive."

"You seem to have rather original views of

married happiness," said Mr Mordaunt, highly amused.

"Oh, a great many people feel with me, I dare say, though they do n't say so, that there is no evil in life-like dulness ; and a good-natured couple without energy must be dull, there is no earthly help for it."

"Ah, my dear," said Mrs Griffith, "if you knew what a really bad-tempered man is, you would know how to value a mild one."

"That I can easily believe," said Eleanor ; "an uneven temper might be tolerated, and even amusing in our bright hours, when we have strength and health ; but I imagine that it must be a sore and fretting trouble in the wear and tear of life, when our powers of body and mind and nerve are worn down by anxiety or sickness."

"You horrid practical creature," said Miss Headington, "that speech would have done very well for a matron of eighty, looking back on the provoking ways of her John Anderson,

who had given her many a rough push down the hill, instead of leading her gently by the hand, and kicking all the great stones out of her way, as in duty bound."

"But Miss Stuart is right," said Mr Mor-daunt, "to look upon life as it is, even upon its threshold. Sickness, sorrow, and care, in some shape, must befall those who launch together on the waves of a troublesome world, and unwise and unhappy is any one who takes a companion unfitted for the storm."

"Mercy upon us!" exclaimed Miss Headington, "just listen to the man. Does he ever expect a wedding fee from any of us? Gram-mercy, fair sir, if you do n't want to frighten us altogether from the holy estate, allow us, at the very least, a honey-moon to look forward to before you remind us of—what are your shocking words?—sickness and sorrow and care."

"And yet," he replied, gently, "we are reminded of them when we stand at the altar, in the very consummation of our happiness, just

before the joy-bells send forth the merriest sounds that can be heard on earth."

Miss Headington looked down for a moment and made no light reply. Perhaps a memory came over her, of the first fresh feelings of her woman's heart before the world had gained an influence over it. Many steps were now heard, and the rest of the gentlemen entered in a body.

"I am really quite vexed," said Mr Hollowdean, walking up to Lady Headington, whose heart sank within her, "quite provoked, I may say, that I was not aware before dinner that the young lady who is staying with you is Lady Anastasia Gordon. Why, the Hollowdeans and the Gordons intermarried in the time of Queen Anne; we might have had a great deal of interesting talk."

"She is gone to bed, poor thing, with *such* a sick headache," replied lady Headington.

"How uncommonly unlucky, to be sure; but I shall be riding this way to-morrow to

inquire about a Scotch terrier, and I will call in and pay my respects to her."

"Only think of that," said Miss Headington to Mr Mordaunt and Eleanor. "He will cut my brother out after all, as sure as fate," and gaily rising, she went to the piano, and rattled away with great brilliancy some of the last new waltzes, and her example being followed by Eleanor and Flora, music occupied the short remainder of the evening. Mrs Lonsdale, greatly dissatisfied with everybody and everything, rose the very instant the carriage was announced. Mr Hollowdean, with bustling politeness, accompanied her down-stairs, observing that it was time for all sensible people to be under cover, and that he should follow her example. His attentions met with but poor appreciation from either Mrs Lonsdale or Flora, who barely thanked him for handing them into the carriage. Poor Flora felt at the moment that she quite hated him for doing what another should have done. Eleanor lingered in the

hall, trying to aid Mr Bromley, who was endeavouring with some little nervous annoyance to ascertain the identity of his hat. At that moment Mr Mordaunt came down, and seeing Eleanor he said :

“ I am so glad to find that you are not gone, for I wanted to tell you—what I am sure you will be pleased to hear—that I have succeeded about poor Hodgson after all.”

“ I am so glad,” replied Eleanor, earnestly. “ Nothing exceeds the pleasure of success in doing good.”

Yes, Eleanor was glad ; but was the feeling all for poor old Hodgson? Weak human nature, did not some of it arise from the fact that Henry Mordaunt had brought his success for her sympathy, as he used to do before?—she would not suffer the thought to proceed, but checked it at once. And there as she stood in the brilliantly-lighted hall, with a bright animated expression in her large dark eyes, and playing about every feature, all was

supplied that was ever wanting to make her beautiful. And Henry Mordaunt was gratified by her reply ; for did it not (weak human nature again) express even more appreciation of his efforts than interest in their object ? And so he looked down with a kind of admiring interest at the beaming face, which any thought that is good or noble could make, at times, so lovely.

Mr Bromley thought that the two looked remarkably well as they thus stood in the bright light ; and though he had ascertained, beyond any tormenting doubt, which was really his hat, he did not appropriate it quite so quickly as he might have done.

“I have never any doubt about my hat,” exclaimed Mr Hollowdean, holding up a bent characteristic-looking article, that could have belonged to no one but himself. “Look here!” and he directed their attention to the lining, on which was written in large characters, J. Hollowdean, Hollowdean.

"That is the best plan," said Mr Bromley, with commendable gravity, "and the only way of preventing mistakes."

"Come, Eleanor," said Mrs Lonsdale, impatiently, "how can you keep your uncle waiting? The horses are taking cold."

"They must be uncommonly delicate, then, to take cold on such a night as this," exclaimed Mr Hollowdean, with a loud merry laugh. Mr Mordaunt carefully handed Eleanor into the carriage, thereby adding anything that might have been wanting to fill up the full measure of Mrs Lonsdale's anger. He said something about calling the next day to fix about the tea at the farm; but to this she vouchsafed no reply, and the carriage drove off.

"I think," remarked Mr Bromley, as they were carefully descending the hill, "that the dinner this time was very tolerably served;" and this he said with a little condescension, excusable in so good a judge of the *cuisine*.

"Yes," replied Mrs Lonsdale in a tone of dissatisfied abstraction.

"I thought the melon wanted flavour," pursued he.

"So did I," said Eleanor; "but I supposed it was because my slice was given to me by that heavy creature, Mr Broughton."

"Then I will take care to leave him out of my next dinner-party," returned Mr Bromley, always ready to respond to a joke.

"What a forward, unpleasant, excitable, disagreeable, overbearing creature Miss Headington is become," exclaimed Mrs Lonsdale. "I would not have Flora go on the Continent on any consideration."

Poor Flora, on the contrary, thought that if a foreign trip could give her the power and successful artillery of Miss Headington, what a very desirable thing it would be. "I cannot think," continued Mrs Lonsdale, having received no answer to her first remark, "how

Mr Mordaunt could be so silly as to flirt in the way he did."

"Flirt!" exclaimed Eleanor.

"Yes, *flirt*," repeated Mrs Lonsdale, with the strongest emphasis on the word; "I have no opinion of a man who goes on in that way, suiting his behaviour to every girl he meets, as I am quite sure he does."

Eleanor made no reply, and Mrs Lonsdale was in some small degree satisfied in having, as she believed, nullified the effect of anything which might have passed in the hall.

* * * * *

"Pshaw, can these foolish women infect one with their opinions? Am I getting fanciful too?" said Mr Bromley to himself, as he closed behind him the door of his comfortable dressing-room. "But they certainly did look very well together, and they are in every possible way suited to make each other happy, if a man only knew what was good for him;

CHAPTER

• The poor too often turn away
 From hearts that shut against
 That will be heard in heaven.
 Of your salvation. Keep!

The Rectory garden loc
 the radiant light of mornin
 dard from bed to bed, calli
 of the purest white, of wi
 bouquet, tastefully relieved
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 Mary Daniels, always a favo
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almost instant. She was a
young girl, and she had
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and appeared as if she
but much of her life was
happiness. She was a
very flower like girl, and
up. And then she was
which Mary had been of
itself: "What is the
over that strange and
to whom she may be
as peril and danger
e to the corridor and
kept her eyes for the
her hope and her
Lonnie had been
garden, but she had
it appeared to be the
her house in the
was despatched to the

but it is of no use to think of that, because he very rarely does. What does Milton say?" and he took down a small edition of the poet from his pet private book-shelf, and, slowly finding the passage he sought, read—

“—for either

He never shall find out fit mate, but such
As some misfortune brings him or mistake;
Or whom he wishes most shall seldom gain
Through her perverseness, or shall see her gain'd
By a far worse.”

And then he turned from the actual idea which had suggested the search, to examine into the sentiments of the writer, and to weigh their truth.

* * * *

Alone in her room, and elevated by a lightness of feeling which comes to some minds after the excitement of company, and a contact with ideas differing from those met with in the ordinary routine of their lives, Eleanor felt a more than usual elasticity of spirit. Hers was a nature fitted to enjoy society. If she met with

sympathy it gladdened her, and if with opposition of opinion it was almost equally agreeable, as giving a healthful play to intellectual power. Cheerful *badinage*, delicate raillery, the glow of poetic sentiment, the depths of feeling, or the calm flow of reasoning, were all in turn acceptable to a mind which, though firm in all essential things, had a natural versatility and power of adaptation, which threw a veil of feminine softness over a highly cultivated mind, and prevented a tendency to *hauteur* and reserve from being unpleasantly perceptible. Still these feelings existed, and they had often risen at her bidding, or from the force of their own uncontrolled power, to make her an enemy, or to rob her of a friend. The dinner-party to her had been very pleasant, and the prominent Miss Headington, instead of exciting envy or annoyance as she had done to Mrs Lonsdale and Flora, had been to her only an amusing study of character. She smiled to herself now as she thought of her and of Mrs

Lonsdale's invectives ; there was contempt too in the smile as she unbound her long dark hair, and freed herself from the dress which, light as it was, seemed too heavy for that sultry night. There was a littleness about Mrs Lonsdale, upon which she was far too much in the habit of looking down as from a pedestal which might indeed be shaken by great and serious faults, but up which mean and little things could have no power to crawl.

It is a great temptation and snare to what is called in human language a lofty nature, to despise those of a lower and meaner stamp, and it is rarely aware of this till it has been brought very low. Eleanor thought of her aunt's jealous suspicions, and of the injustice of which they had led her to be guilty. Flirt, Mr Mor-daunt, flirt ! What an odd unsuitable word that was. But why should she be troubled about it ? That thought marred the harmony of her light feelings ; but in a little while it passed and left her free to the pleasant influence of

the hour. She sat down by her open window to enjoy the cool reviving air, and gazed upon the scene without, so quiet in its calm and shadowy beauty, lying in the light of that glorious thing, the harvest moon ; and vague but happy thoughts rose unbidden, and scarcely connected, to her mind. At last her eye rested upon the village spire upon the hill, and it suggested many a memory connected with the days of her happy childhood and early youth, passed amidst country scenes, and earnest studies, and simple pleasures ; and then followed the remembrance of the renewal of those tastes at Carstone, and the awakening of the better spirit which uncongenial circumstances had damped, as if with a chilling spell ; and then arose, as if in natural connection, the image of one by whose touch that spirit had been so much encouraged ; and then, ah, treacherous hour of lonely musing ! what a vision came of what life, in the fullest meaning of the word, might be, with all that could content the natural and

holy affections of the heart, all that could satisfy the strictest principle, and gratify the yearnings of the mind after sympathy and counsel, a lot blessed at home, and going forth to shed its blessed influence on all around, walking hand in hand, and thought with thought, with one who

“ Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.”

CHAPTER VII.

“ Though thou speak’st truth,
Methinks thou speak’st not well.”—*Coriolanus*.

THE next morning, after Mr Bromley had departed to his study, the social atmosphere was so uncongenial that Eleanor at once retired within herself, and chose an occupation which required no companionship ; she took her seat at her favourite little table in the drawing-room, and set herself busily to work to finish a sketch for the school-house, which she had promised to prepare for Mr Mordaunt. It was a glorious morning, a continuation of the lovely weather of the last three weeks, and she sat in

the full enjoyment of all its beauty, earnestly employed, and yet taking in each fragrant scent and each melodious sound. The hum of the bees especially seemed in harmony with the tone of her mind. They were zealously carrying on the active duties of their lives, amidst all that was sweet and bright, a type, she felt, of the true life that man should lead, in striving, energetic labour, yet allowing himself to be cheered by the "flowers of Eden we still inherit." As thus she worked in a dreamy, pleasant absorption, she was quite unconscious of the looks askance which Mrs Lonsdale was bestowing upon her. She was netting in a quick, irritable manner, giving now and then a sudden jerk to her cotton, which must have well tested its strength. A settled frown was on her face, gathering into quite a little nest of wrinkles in the centre of her forehead.

On Flora's countenance sat an expression of unhappiness and discontent, a sign of that pitiable mood which the best-regulated minds

find it so difficult to overcome, and in which friends, if they have tact and feeling, leave us to ourselves, without intruding a remedy, which, failing, may, in one weak moment, send us over the narrow boundary which lies at such a time between depression and ill-humour; she had taken up at random one of the books on the drawing-room table, and sinking into a corner of the sofa, with her feet on a very high ottoman, stooped in so unbecoming an attitude as to increase the frown upon her mother's face, who occasionally glanced at her, and then with sharpness at Eleanor, whose occupation she could not bear to see, as her thoughts varied between blame at her forwardness in drawing for the Steyne school-house, and jealous anticipations of the thanks and appreciation of Henry Mordaunt. Under these circumstances, it is not strange that more than an hour passed without a word being uttered; at last all three looked up at the clicking sound of the opening of the avenue gate.

“ The new butcher’s boy has mistaken the way to the back door,” said Mrs Lonsdale crossly and decidedly, as if an opinion, if very firmly expressed, could prevent its being Mr Mordaunt, whose appearance, at that moment, would be very distasteful to her. As the drawing-room was at the back of the house, no information could be gained from the windows; but soon the firm-sounding ring which a welcome visitor is in the habit of giving resounded through the hall, and shortly afterwards Mr Mordaunt was announced. Eleanor was the only one who gave him the accustomed friendly greeting. Mrs Lonsdale shook hands hurriedly, as if the interruption were likely to do some mischief to her work, and Flora languidly suffered her little hand to rest in his for the briefest space, and then carefully noticed where she had left off in her reading, deliberately placed a marker, closed the book, and afterwards opened it again, to ascertain if it had been put in the right place, and then slowly took up her work.

"What a lovely drive we had last night through Cranberry Park," said Eleanor. "I don't think I have ever before seen even the harvest moon look so surpassingly beautiful."

Mr Mordaunt gave an answer which showed that he had scarcely heard what she said, and glanced uneasily at Flora. Eleanor experienced a quick sense of annoyance, for which she told herself that there was no cause, and her observation, ordinary as it was, appeared to her romantic and absurd. Mrs Lonsdale noted both the abstracted reply and the uneasy glance, and her inward irritability decreased, though her forbidding look remained. The uncomfortable silence that might have followed (for Eleanor was not disposed to speak again) was prevented by a scratching outside the door, and a plaintive entreating whine.

"What is that?" asked Mrs Lonsdale.

"That is a puppy I brought with me for an airing; I am very sorry, but I thought he had been carefully shut out when I came into the hall."

"Let him in, by all means ; Flora is so fond of dogs."

"But he may be troublesome."

"Not at all,—come, let in your new favourite ; and let us see what it is like."

"My *new* favourite," said he, smiling at Flora, as he rose. "Is not that too bad, Miss Lonsdale ? Does it not imply a charge of fickleness ?"

"I don't know, I am sure," returned Flora, with languid indifference.

Mr Mordaunt bit his lip, as he walked to the door and admitted a fine Newfoundland puppy, full of the exuberant playfulness of its untamed youth.

"What a beautiful creature !" exclaimed Mrs Lonsdale and Eleanor together ; but Flora, that presumed lover of dogs, vouchsafed no comment. After running round and round his master, and trying to gnaw the end of his riding-whip, the dog, with one bound, reached the sofa, and made two or three jumps at

Flora's work. "Look at him, pretty creature," said her mother, "he will just suit you, he is longing for a game of play."

"Down, down!" exclaimed Flora, pettishly; "*down*, you tiresome creature."

"Come here, sir," cried his master, sharply; but the puppy had not yet learned how essential a place obedience holds in the list of a dog's virtues, so he continued pertinaciously to elaim. Flora's notice, while she as obstinately withheld it. At last a higher jump made him succeed in getting one end of her work between his teeth; she extricated it with some difficulty, and then rose and put it on the very highest shelf of the what-not, as if in any lower situation it would be insecure. Eleanor had never seen Mr Mordaunt look so much annoyed before. He went hastily to the dog, and gave him a sharp cut with his riding-whip, which made him yell with pain.

"What are you about?" exclaimed Eleanor, indignantly. "The dog is not in fault. Bring

him here, and put him out on the lawn, where he can play about as much as he likes."

A still more angry flush rose to Mr Mordaunt's cheek, but he did just as she bade him, and, taking up the dog, let him out through the window, and then resumed his seat. For a little time no one spoke. Eleanor was generally ready in all conversational emergencies, but at present she did not choose to exert her powers. Flora had taken her work from the what-not, and appeared quite engrossed by it. Mrs Lonsdale, who was not without a certain degree of cleverness, saw that it was now incumbent on her to come to the rescue. Nothing could have pleased her better than the little scene that had just passed; even Flora's ill-humour, which at first she had blamed, now, judging as minds like hers do by the event, she greatly applauded. She was therefore encouraged to manage in a way which she flattered herself was extremely adroit.

"Now," said she, suddenly stopping in her

work, "I am quite ready, Mr Mordaunt, to hear all you have got to talk to me about—which, to tell the truth, I really was not before, for this piece of work has been teasing me out of my life; I thought I never should get it square. It is for an antimacassar, like the one behind you. I can only do the foundation—that is quite puzzling enough for me—but Flora is going to work in a cockatoo."

"Indeed! I have no doubt it will be very elegant."

"What glorious weather we have, and indeed, I may say, have had for the last month."

"We have indeed."

"I should think the harvest must be all in by this time. I am sure it ought to be."

"I believe it is about here, excepting in that large field before you come to Widow Grey's."

"Ah, that Barrett is always behind his neighbours. But, speaking of Widow Grey, I

thought you were all talking the other night of drinking tea with her."

"Yes, we were; and I called this morning to propose fixing when it should be."

"Any evening, I should think, would do. We have no engagement at present, have we, girls?"

"None at all, Aunt Louisa," returned Eleanor.

"Then, as it makes no difference to you, shall it be Friday, as that evening will be the most convenient for me?"

"No, let it be Saturday," said Flora, speaking for the first time.

"I am afraid Saturday will not suit me," said Mr Mordaunt, with an air as if he feared to give offence. "Why may it not be Friday?"

"Friday won't do for me," said Flora, quietly; "but that need not matter. I don't know that I care much about going. The evenings are so dreadfully hot for a long

walk, and, if all go, who is to make tea for Uncle James ? ”

“ Why, my dear child,” remonstrated her mother, “ you have been looking forward to this little treat all the week, and you really must go. It is very kind of you, and just like you, to think of Uncle James ; but I am sure he won’t mind taking his tea alone for once.”

Still Flora was not to be persuaded into entering into the matter with the slightest zest. Eleanor sat quiet, watching with a strangely minute attention the deprecating manner of Henry Mordaunt, increasing in proportion to Flora’s perverseness, and that depression which trifles had of late the power to bring fell upon her like a dead weight.

“ I would indeed make it Saturday, if I could,” said Mr Mordaunt in his most conciliatory manner ; “ only, in doing so, I should disappoint the poor old people at the almshouse, as on that evening I give them a lecture.”

"But you can go to them on Friday; what difference can it make?"

"You know I like to be punctual in such matters," said he, in a tone of slight annoyance; "and, besides, my time is so fully occupied, that I could not prepare their lecture till Saturday morning."

Mrs Lonsdale cast a warning glance at her daughter, to which Flora was quite impervious—when once set upon a small point she could be very obstinate.

"You have not begun this lecture very long," she persisted, "so what can it matter to put it off for once?"

"My dear," remonstrated her mother, "you can't be in earnest. It is nothing but her nonsense—just to tease you a bit, Mr Mor-daunt. I am sure she would give up all the teas in the world, dear child, rather than the poor old creatures should lose their lecture. We will settle it at once for Friday."

"No, mamma, Friday won't do for me; but

as I really don't care about it, you and Eleanor can very well go, and I will stay at home, as I said, and make tea for Uncle James."

"I think," said Eleanor, rising, "while you are concluding the arrangement I will see after the little dog, as I must answer for all the mischief he does if he finds the door of the kitchen-garden open."

Ashamed of Flora, and glad to escape, lest she should be tempted to join in the discussion, she stepped out on the lawn, and, under the influence of a state of feeling which it seemed absurd to have had roused, she walked rapidly on. In a very short time she found the ostensible object of her errand amusing himself very harmlessly, under the cedar, with the head of an old besom which he had dragged out from amongst the bushes. She stood under the shade and watched his gambols; not that the sight afforded her any amusement, but it seemed a relief to have something

to look at and observe. Her head was thrown back, and a proud curl was on her lip ; she felt a contempt for Flora's childish behaviour, for her want both of delicacy and dignity in showing herself offended when she had no right to be so ; and yet this very want of dignity had gained a consideration which it had not deserved. How derogatory and how unlike himself it was for Henry Mordaunt to stoop to court her from her caprice ; but the more derogatory, the more unlike himself, was it not the stronger proof of—here she checked the inquiring thought, by the force of a strong, proud will, and then the flush upon her cheek had waned ; her slight figure relaxed from its erect carriage, and the expression of her features gave place to another almost as imperceptibly as the change in a dissolving view.

“ He is not perfect,” she said to herself. “ He is but a man after all ; and here he has been treated so like an idol, that when the incense is not offered he must needs come

down from his shrine, poor idol ! to find out the reason why. Miss Headington was right ; it will be well for me to mix in a wider world, where comparisons are possible. Come, doggy," she said, " if you will answer to that name, come along, poor fellow," and she tried to attract his attention, and make him follow her.

" Thank you, thank you, I was just coming to look for him," said a voice behind her, for the step on the green sward had been unheard, and Mr Mordaunt stood before her, with a look of radiant good-humour, which told that the discussion had ended more pleasantly than it had begun. " Come along, sir, come along, for we have not much time to spare. Why, what an eccentric plaything you have found for him, Miss Stuart ; he will not leave it to follow me ! Shall I be obliged to ride all the way to Steyne with that old broom-head fastened to my saddle by way of an attraction ? "

His gay mood did not communicate itself

to Eleanor. She stooped down and tried gently to disengage his plaything from the dog, and, having succeeded, she threw it beyond his reach. Mr Mordaunt, who was generally so ready with his politeness on such little occasions, stood still and watched her, and seemed lost in a kind of reverie.

“What is your dog’s name? Call him now, and he will come.”

“He has no name—we have not even that advantage,” he answered, with an amused smile. “If we walk towards the house, no doubt he will follow.”

As they moved from the spot, he added, with a little hesitation, “I believe you said any evening would be convenient to you; so we have fixed to go to the farm on Saturday.”

“Indeed!”

“Were we mistaken, then, in thinking that it would suit you?”

“It suits me very well, but how have you made it suit yourself?”

"Oh, one should not be too strict about one's own plans where the pleasure of others is concerned."

"And yet you gave a sufficient reason for being firm."

"Surely, Miss Stuart, you do not blame me for setting aside my own wishes to oblige another?"

"You must excuse me, however," said Eleanor lightly, "if I withhold from so good an action that very important thing, my approbation."

"Pardon me," he replied, much annoyed, and the more so as he was really of her opinion, "if I venture frankly to tell you of a fault which it is a pity to see in you, mingling with so many pleasant qualities—" He paused.

"If you are waiting for my permission, speak on and spare not," she said in the same tone as before.

"Then forgive me for saying that you sometimes indulge in a severity of judgment, a

harshness in viewing little things, which often mars the harmony of your character."

"I believe it is the rule to be very much obliged for an unpalatable truth, so pray take it for granted that I am so. The reproof of course is enhanced in value by its being so well-timed and expressive of the disinterested spirit of the reprover."

For the second time that morning Henry Mordaunt bit his lip.

"Sarcasm is of course a bar to all frankness. I ask your pardon, and I have done."

"And, in the true spirit of moderation, you wind up with a second accusation."

By this time they had reached the house, and he stood back to allow her to precede him. "No, thank you, I am not going in again, I shall finish my stroll in the garden."

He took a very stiff leave, and, turning away, she took a leisurely but certain course over the lawn, and under the broad branches of the cedar, and along a winding gravel walk, and

paused not till she had reached a sequestered spot, where a small brook separated the garden from the adjoining meadow. It was a favourite haunt of hers, because rarely intruded upon. She sat down on the grass, at the foot of a wild-looking Scotch fir, and gazed, as she had often done before, on the clear stream of the brook flowing along over its smooth gravelly bed. Her eye noted minutely each knob and broken branch of the stunted old willow that overhung the water, but her attention was all turned within; a soothing power had the murmuring of the stream and the quiet scene around her; a long time she sat without moving, or even changing the direction of her eyes, fixed on the twisted trunk of the tree. She was thinking very earnestly, not merely of the words which had escaped her, but of the feelings, deep, tumultuous, striving for the mastery, which had been beneath the surface. In our regrets the thought unspoken often claims the largest place; the words we have

uttered may have given but a glimpse, and that a very faint one, of what was passing within.

“ He was right,” she said to herself, when, after long musing, her thoughts had been collected into a clear and reasonable shape. “ He has told me the truth of myself, though it was spoken in irritation, and, from the way in which I received it, I have lost an opportunity which can scarcely occur again of making him understand me better, for I have pained him many times ; at one time we were friends helping each other, and then came a cloud.”

For some time after, when, as it were, the echo of this thought had died away, she still sat on in her motionless attitude, and the brook went on with its even murmur beneath her feet, and the reflections within her seemed to keep time with it in their dreamy course. Then she rose and walked back, without lingering, along the exact path by which she had come, and entered the house. The party were assembled at lunch, and Mrs Lonsdale greeted

her with a smiling cordiality which covered the inquiring glance with which the punctuality-loving Mr Bromley always received a late arrival.

Flora was sitting with a look of silent satisfaction upon her face, as if she were chewing the cud of some very agreeable thought.

“What do you think, dear,” said Mrs Lonsdale, smiling at Eleanor, “this saucy girl has been doing? She actually made Mr Mordaunt put off his lecture and go to the tea-drinking on the day she wanted, just because her coolest muslin dress would not be home from the wash before Saturday. Did you ever hear of such an impertinent little puss in all your life? I only wonder that Mr Mordaunt gave way to her; a very foolish creature, I am sure, he must be, do n’t you think so?”

The spirit which had come to Eleanor in nature’s gentle quiet was with her still; so she gave not even a look to damp Flora’s self-complacency.

“It was a pity to interfere with the lecture,” said Mr Bromley, as he rose to leave the room, “and though I am not very learned in such matters, I fancy that Mrs Cramp, who is a very obliging woman, would have got up the indispensable dress on the shortest notice, if you had sent her a message.”

Flora tossed her head when he had departed. How stupid of Uncle James! how little did he understand the dear delight of the success of this first test of her power over Henry Mordaunt.

CHAPTER VIII.

Go ! if the peaceful cot your praises share,
Go look within, and ask if peace be there.—CRABBE.

“JAMES, *do* you mind dining a little bit earlier to-day ?” said Mrs Lonsdale, in her most insinuating tones, at breakfast, on Saturday morning. Mr Bromley, who did not like changing his dinner hour, but still was a reasonable man, looked up from his beautifully cooked rasher, as if waiting for a sufficient cause to be assigned for the request.

“You know we are going to this sort of little pic-nic, if I may call it so, at Mrs Grey’s,

a little treat that the girls have set their hearts upon, and Mr Mordaunt, no doubt, will be here early to go with us ; and you know the evenings now are beginning to close in, and I do n't like Flora to be out in the damp."

" Well," said Mr Bromley, with resigned politeness, " name your hour."

" *Would* five, or half-past four, be too early for you ? "

" Half-past four, then, let it be. Nelly, my dear, I'll trouble you for the toast."

" Is n't your uncle kind ? " said Mrs Lonsdale to Flora.

" Very kind indeed, mamma ; do you think Mrs Cramp will send home my dress in time ? "

" Naughty little puss, I am sure, if I were you, I should be ashamed ever to see that dress again."

Flora smiled with a pretty little conceited satisfaction, and pretended to be very interested in the paper, hazarding, in her good spirits, two or three observations on the news of the

day, which betrayed complete ignorance of previous events, and which Mr Bromley received with patient politeness.

"I *must* be occupied," felt Eleanor, when they had left the breakfast table; and yet the sultry morning seemed to preclude activity, and to invite to lounging repose those who were not compelled to exert themselves. She went to her room with the intention of arranging as much of her packing as could be done so early. Maria, duster in hand, was in occupation.

"Never mind, Maria, I will come again presently."

"No, Miss, I have quite done now," said Maria, giving a hasty finishing touch to the looking-glass, and she prepared to leave the room, but paused midway, with her hand resting on the chest of drawers, and her eyes giving a sort of reconnoitre, to find out whether she might indulge in a little news.

Eleanor looked grave, and seemed scarcely aware of her presence.

"I am sure, Miss, you will be sorry to hear how bad Mary Daniells's match has turned out already."

"Indeed!" said Eleanor in a voice of concern, which encouraged her to proceed.

"Yes, Miss, they have had a most violent quarrel about poor Jane that's lying ill, I've been told; and he's gone off and left her, and they think he'll 'list, or go to Australia, or do something."

"You are quite right to tell me this, Maria; I will go to see her now, before the day becomes too hot."

Maria departed well-pleased with the reception of her intelligence, and as she was going she cast an admiring glance at Eleanor, who was bending over her bonnet-box to equip herself immediately for her walk.

"She'd do more good at Steyne than Miss Flora," she thought; "but then men choose to please themselves, as is but nat'ral, and Miss

Flora has the prettiest face, though, to my mind, Miss Stuart is more of a lady."

"Poor Jane, who is lying ill," repeated Eleanor, as she hastily put on her bonnet, "I ought to have remembered her before." A painful consciousness that interest in the concerns of others had lately been dormant within her came over her, and a dimness, like tears, obscured her sight. She finished her preparations very quickly, and went down-stairs.

"Oh, where are you going?" asked Flora, meeting her.

"Into the village."

"Then *do* you mind calling at Mrs Cramp's? I am so afraid she will not send my dress home in time."

Mrs Cramp lived half-way up a steep hill on the other side of the village. Eleanor's first impulse was to decline a commission which she felt to be both selfish and unnecessary, but a second thought stopped her. She had a

kind of feeling, she knew not why, that she might be glad to reflect afterwards that she had done everything that day that was gentle and kind to Flora ; therefore, without a word about the heat or the length of the way, she assented, and received in return a fervently grateful, "Oh, thank you." There was at that early hour a pleasant shade on one side of the lane which made the short cut to the village, and she took advantage of it, and, invigorated by the walk, arrived with a brighter spirit at the neat little cottage, which had been prepared with such careful pride for the pretty bride. A listless "Come in" answered Eleanor's gentle tap, and she entered, to find Mary seated at her work, with a heavy countenance and swollen eyes—not at all a face to suit the romantic anticipations of the wedding morning. Eleanor did not immediately unfold the express object of her coming, but led to it with as much careful tact as if she had been conversing with a friend in her own

station. A true delicacy of feeling gave her this manner with her poorer neighbours, and it was in a great measure the secret of her influence. Mary talked for a little time in an abstracted manner on the topics introduced by Eleanor; but it was not long before she had confided to her the first great grief of her married life. She spoke of her disappointment in her husband on finding how heartlessly he had jilted Jane Jennings, of how it was the talk of the village since Jane had fallen ill, and how it had embittered her home, and caused the reproaches which had produced incensed replies from her husband, followed by his angry departure to go to a friend who, she believed, would do him no good, and when he would come back she did not know, and she did not care.

“But you do care,” said Eleanor, “and, what is more, you will care through all your life long, if you live to be a very old woman. You will never cease to care, if you continue

in such a mood as this. The wife who allows her husband to quit her influence has that to answer for which will lie heavy upon her to her dying hour."

"But he was in the wrong, and yet he taunted me as if the fault was mine, and not his," said Mary, indignantly; "and he swore he would never stoop to ask a wife's pardon for anything."

Eleanor saw that the usually gentle and rational Mary was stirred up to a mood very dangerous in those who claim a kind of privilege from being habitually in the right.

"You are wrong, Mary, I assure you," she said, firmly. "From your own showing, you must have behaved to your husband with a great deal too much temper, and he is a man of strong, sometimes desperate, passions; and having left you with his heart full of bitterness, he may never return. However wrong he had been, you had no right to call him to account for anything that had preceded your

marriage. And if you had listened to gossips' tales as much before as you have now, you would have known of his courtship to poor Jane ; and you were then your own mistress, and could have refused to have had anything to do with him. I wonder at you, Mary ; you have not acted the part of a good and gentle wife, who should give her husband peace at home, however the world may blame him abroad."

Mary's blue eyes opened in astonishment, as she looked fixedly in the face of her stern young judge ; and then she burst into a passion of tears.

"Have I been too severe now ?" thought Eleanor, remembering the late judgment passed upon her, and her countenance softened.

"What am I to do then, Miss Stuart ?" said the weeping Mary ; "what would you do in my place?"

"You had better write to him at once,

Mary, a loving gentle letter, without the least reproach, and ask him to come back."

Mary's woman's pride winced at this advice.

"At least, if you love him you had better do this. He always fancied a soldier's life, and he is in the mood now to act on the first rash thought."

Mary rose and walked to the shelf on which lay her simple writing materials. She sat down, and dipped her pen in the little ink jar.

"Tell me what I shall say."

"I could not give you worse help. Write from your heart, Mary—just in your own way."

Mary did as she was bid, and Eleanor turned aside, not to see the big tears that were falling on the paper.

"But you will read it, Miss Eleanor, to see if it will do?"

"Nothing could be better," said Eleanor, with extreme gentleness, as she returned the letter. "And now, Mary, fold it and direct it, and I will find a trusty messenger."

"God bless you, Miss Stuart," said Mary, with a quivering lip, and Eleanor, having possessed herself of the letter, left the cottage without another word. She could think of no one better to do her errand than the trustworthy eldest son of Mrs Cramp. So she set off with great alacrity to ascend the dreaded hill. She had not proceeded far before she saw a horse and its rider coming along the road ; and Mr Mordaunt joined her, walking his horse at a leisurely pace, while the puppy, now again his companion, ran along snapping at the longest blades of grass on the borders of the ditch.

"Oh," thought she, "if he were but going to Brainbridge."

He took off his hat a little stiffly ; it was evident that he had not forgotten the conversation in the garden.

"Are you going to Brainbridge ?" said Eleanor eagerly.

"No, I have no business there to-day ; I

am going round by Swallowfield, and then home to an early dinner."

"But I do so wish your strong swift horse were going to take you to Brainbridge, for I am sure there is a recruiting serjeant there."

"But I do n't want to enlist, and therefore I require something more attractive than a recruiting serjeant to make me gallop over the hot, dusty road to Brainbridge."

"I beg your pardon," she said, vexed with herself for having introduced the subject in the style of Mrs Lonsdale. "I have something then much more attractive to hold out as a reward for such a ride ; you may help a work of peace, prevent much remorse, and reconcile a husband and wife." And as he walked his horse by her side, she told him all about Mary and her husband. He listened attentively, and then said, "You are quite right in sending off the letter. I cannot take it myself, but if you will give it to me I will send my groom with it as soon as I return from Swallowfield."

Eleanor was dissatisfied ; alas for the alloy that mingles with our best actions ! For a few moments self prevailed over concern for another. This was but a poor luke-warm way of aiding her, very different from the ardent coöperation of the olden time. She was silent, battling with herself ; it was a quick, sharp engagement, and she came off victorious.

“ Will not that do, Miss Stuart ? ” for she had made no reply.

“ Have you any urgent business in Swallowfield ? ”

“ No, but I wish to go there.”

“ If you will not think me too encroaching, may I beg you to give up your wish, and to be yourself the bearer of this letter ? A groom cannot manage as you could ; you would find out Joe, wherever he is ; you would act with judgment, tact, and kindness ; you would succeed if any one could. I wish you would go.”

She stopped in her earnestness, with a flush

of eager feeling on her delicate face. It was one of her moments of beauty.

“Give me the letter,” said he, extending his hand, “I will do your bidding.”

“Thank you, thank you,” she replied, warmly, and in a few minutes the gallant grey was bearing his master at full speed along the Brainbridge road. Eleanor stood still until the echo of the horse’s hoofs had died away, and then she went on slowly, and the light had left her eye, and there was a shadow on her brow when she opened the little wicket that led into Mrs Cramp’s garden, where the fragrant scent of wall-flowers and white stocks almost prevailed over the odour of soap-suds which was making its way through the wash-house window. Mrs Cramp, who was hard at work ironing in the kitchen, looked half pleased to see her visitor, and half sorry to be interrupted, but she stopped with great civility to hand her a chair, the only one at liberty from clothes-baskets and linen.

"I will only rest for a little time, thank you," said Eleanor, really glad to sit down. "But you must go on with your work, Mrs Cramp, and never mind me."

"Well, to be sure, I can't well lose a minute, Miss, for I am rather of the ratherest behind, as I may say."

"I called to beg you to be kind enough to send home Miss Lonsdale's blue muslin early in the afternoon, as she wants to wear it this evening."

"So she sent word, but dear, *dear* now, Miss, do she really want it, now? I thought I'd put it by and do it late this evening, as I have such a sight of baby-linen to get up for Mrs Lyne; beside young Squire Headington's shirts, and he sends um all the way to me as he says I suits un, and both of them lives a long ways off to send to after dusk."

Eleanor felt rewarded for her walk, and thankful that she had not denounced Flora's request as a whim. "But for all that," she said, with the persuasive smile which Mrs

Cramp, who was one of her admirers, thought so taking, "you must, if you please, send Miss Lonsdale's dress by four o'clock ; she has set her heart upon having it, and I came up the hill on purpose to ask you not to forget it."

"Well, to be sure. Then, if it must be done, it *must*. I'll do it, Miss, never you fear, and my Jem shall run up with it as soon as ever 'tis done."

Satisfied with this, Eleanor took her leave, Mrs Cramp following her to the door, heater in hand, to beg her to take as many of her favourite wall-flowers as ever she liked. One more thing had she to do before returning. When she had descended to the village, she called to inquire for poor Jane, but heard that she was sleeping, and could not be seen, so she promised to come again on Monday ; and after trying to say a few words of comfort to the unhappy mother, she walked back to the Rectory, tired, but well satisfied with her morning's work.

CHAPTER IX.

Her hand lay trembling on his arm,
Averted glow'd the happy face,
A softer hue, a mightier charm,
Grew mellowing o'er the hour, the place;
Along the breathing woodlands moved
A presence dream-like and divine;
How sweet to love and to be beloved,
To lean upon a heart that's thine!

BULWER LYTTON.

A SOMETHING heavy seemed in the air that Saturday afternoon, and it grew no cooler, though the middle of the day was passed. Eleanor strove in vain against a weariness both of body and spirit, and then, giving up the attempt, she retired to her own room, and throw-

ing herself back in an old-fashioned easy chair, tried to read. She took up her greatest favourite, Shakespeare, but he could not fix her attention. She changed from one play to another without exciting any interest ; so she went down-stairs to fetch the first volume of a novel which had been absorbing to everyone who had spoken of it, and which she hoped would have the same effect upon her. It succeeded better than Shakespeare, but yet her eyes were often raised from the page and fixed dreamily on the tall elm trees that skirted the garden. She was roused from one of these fits of abstraction by the announcement of dinner. Dessert had just been set on the table, when Mr Mordaunt arrived. Mrs Lonsdale and Flora rose in smiling haste to put on their bonnets.

“ Shall Mr Mordaunt be shown in here, James, to have a glass of wine with you, while we are getting ready ? ” said Mrs Lonsdale, turning when she reached the door.

"No, not to-day," replied the usually hospitable Mr Bromley. "He can wait that short time in the drawing-room. You have taken no wine," he said to Eleanor, who was preparing less quickly to follow. "You don't take enough care of yourself, my dear. Here, drink this to oblige me." And he poured out a full glass of his rich old Port. She took it with a grateful smile and drank it.

"Good-bye, Nelly; wrap yourself up when you come back, for there is a heavy dew now after sunset."

When she had departed, why did he lean back in his arm-chair with a face so much graver than usual? and why did he let full five minutes pass by before he helped himself from that fine dish of peaches which had ripened to such exquisite perfection on the southern wall?

Eleanor was the last to enter the drawing-room. It struck her at first that Flora was too much dressed for the occasion, but on a

second glance she would not criticize, so extremely pretty and blooming did Flora look in her flounced blue dress, so carefully got up by Mrs Cramp ; her small black mantle, and the little white silk bonnet, with its wreath of blue daisies, suiting so admirably with the blue eyes and bright complexion. Eleanor wondered to herself why she noticed so particularly all she wore, even to the new dove-coloured kid gloves, more adapted to a flower-show than to Mrs Grey's simple tea.

"Come, love," said Mrs Lonsdale, when she entered, "we are waiting for you. The procession is ready to set out, is it not, Mr Mor-daunt ?"

"Quite," he replied, but not with any great alacrity, for Flora had given a little dissatisfied toss of the head to something he had been saying to her. The party set off; Eleanor kept by Mrs Lonsdale's side as they walked down the avenue, and she seemed well pleased to have it so, and talked very volubly,

as if she feared that the shortest pause would send her away. She went on very quickly, but not so fast but that Mr Mordaunt gained upon them in time to open the gate. This movement brought him to Eleanor's side.

"It will be all right now, I trust. I found Joe just in time," he said to her in a low voice.

"I cannot thank you enough," she replied; but she blamed herself for the little gladness that was in her heart, the little warmth in her words.

They continued to talk a little longer on the subject, which kept them together until they turned into the narrow lane which lay in their route; Mrs Lonsdale and Flora were in advance. "We shall never be able to go this way, I am sure," said the former, stopping short before a stile which separated the lane from the meadow they had to cross. The stile had certainly a very awkward appearance, for it was made of one thick plank of wood, which leaned towards them; neither Mrs Lonsdale

nor Flora chose to perceive a gate fastened loosely by an old rope, which was close at hand, so they stood still until Mr Mordaunt and Eleanor came up.

"Here is another way," said Mr Mordaunt, smiling at their discomfiture; and he went to the gate, which merely required the loop of rope to be moved from the two posts, to enable him to open it with the greatest ease.

"Well, to be sure, how clever you are!" exclaimed Mrs Lonsdale. "It would never have done for us to have come this way by ourselves, would it, girls?"

In another mood the sarcastic smile would have come to Eleanor's lip, at the thought of how often she and Flora had passed through the gate, or clambered over the stile, on their way to Widow Grey's; but now she went quietly on, and would indulge in no contempt at the little manœuvre. It succeeded, however, and Mrs Lonsdale was again at her side, with that incessant talk whose only recommen-

dation was that it scarcely required a response. They passed through the meadow, and entered the long corn-field, and still that voice went on, until, to Eleanor's excited nerves, it seemed to weary not only her ear but her very brain.

On arriving at the farm-house, they found Mrs Grey dressed in the very perfection of neatness, waiting to give them a most cordial welcome.

"As the evening is so beautiful, Sir, I thought the ladies would like their tea out of doors, under the hawthorn."

"Oh, yes! of all things we should like it," exclaimed Flora. "And look here—there are plenty of seats in the porch—so you need not bring out any chairs, Mrs Grey."

"Then I suppose the question is settled," said Mr Mordaunt; so tea was prepared under the hawthorn, in the romantic old-fashioned garden, with the beautiful view before them of the valley beneath. This view was quite one of the lions of Carstone, and strangers

would take the walk on purpose to see it. The party, being so small, ought to have been very merry, but it was not. Mrs Lonsdale seemed excited and fidgety, and did not reply with attention to anything that was said to her. Eleanor talked to Mrs Grey, but without the lightness and animation required to prevent such a little meeting from being a failure. Henry Mordaunt was in a mood which can be best described as unlike himself. Flora was restless about her seat, and kept constantly changing it, assigning the most trivial reasons for her movements. Mrs Grey was the only one who played her part well; she supplied her guests with new bread and the most delicious butter and cream, and attended to them with a calm, cordial hospitality, undisturbed by fidgeting fears about their enjoyment, which might have been copied with advantage by many a hostess of higher breeding. When Flora had received her second cup, she was seized with another desire for a fresh seat, and went off with her

tea to the stump of a felled tree close by, asserting that she had at last suited herself, and that she was perfectly contented, and she hoped no one would disturb her, not even Mrs Grey with her delicious bread and butter, for she wanted to enjoy the view. She seemed to Eleanor to appear in a new light, and to say things that were not in keeping with her style of character.

“She is copying Miss Headington, and it does not suit her,” said she to herself; and then, chiding the thought, she quickly addressed herself to Mrs Grey.

“Notwithstanding your prohibition, may I venture to offer you some bread and butter?” said Mr Mordaunt, approaching Flora. When she had taken some, he placed the plate upon the grass, and lingered by her side. Mrs Lonsdale began talking away again very fast, as before, all about nothing.

“Oh!” thought Eleanor, “that we were at home—that we were anywhere but here!”

As long as the *tête-à-tête* at the stump of the tree continued, Mrs Lonsdale was content to be still ; but when Mr Mordaunt again moved towards them, she discovered that it was too late to be sitting in the open air ; and she proposed a stroll about the garden before returning home. This was assented to, and Mr Mordaunt and Flora were again side by side ; and after a while they turned into an old-fashioned turf-walk, with a row of apple-trees on one side, and a quickset hedge on the other, where they were soon lost to view.

“ Dear Mrs Grey,” said Mrs Lonsdale, “ I think, if you will allow me, I will go in and sit down in your sweet little parlour to enjoy the view from the window ; for, to confess the truth, I feel a little touch of rheumatism. It seems odd to have it in this weather, but the dew is rising, and I always find it very catch-coldy after a sultry day.”

“ To be sure, ma’am, and so it is ; walk in by all means, if you please. Shall I call Miss Flora ? ”

“ Oh, dear no, poor little thing, let her enjoy herself while she can. It is astonishing what these young things can stand ; still, Eleanor, my dear, I think it would be more prudent for you to come in ; I don’t know what your uncle would say to me if you should bring on that cough of yours to-night.”

It was the first time that Eleanor had heard that she had a cough which might be termed her own, but no curve came to her lip, no smile to her eye, and she followed them in ; for why should she stay out ? The sun was setting in gorgeous beauty ; lovely tints, like those we dream will meet our eyes in heaven, were in the radiant western sky. Earth, under all the sweetest influences of “ dewy eve,” spoke to the heart through the senses with its most soothing voice, but why should *she* stay out ? She followed them quietly in.

“ Now this is what *I* call charming,” exclaimed Mrs Lonsdale, seating herself in the

window-seat of the little parlour. "There is no life equal to the life of a farm-house, Mrs Grey; I always thought so, and I used to say to poor dear Captain Lonsdale in our courting days, 'How I wish you were a farmer and kept a farm,' just to tease him a bit in my joking way, for, poor dear man, he scarcely knew a cow from a pig."

"He would n't have made much of a farmer then, ma'am," remarked Mrs Grey, in that quiet matter-of-fact way which shows that an observation intended for a joke has not been successful.

"What a splendid view, to be sure! Why, Eleanor, child, why do n't you come and enjoy the view as long as you can get it, instead of sitting back there?"

"Miss Stuart is looking tired, ma'am; shall I get you a glass of our new milk, Miss, that you say always sets you up?"

"Thank you, Mrs Grey, you are very kind."

Mrs Grey went away on her hospitable er-

rand, and Eleanor fervently hoped that her aunt would not talk on in that quick excited manner while she was gone. She did not, but sat silent for a bit, peering out of the window with an inquisitive, impatient scrutiny, though she saw no one.

Mrs Grey returned, and Eleanor gratefully received the milk, though she did not want it, and could only drink it with a great effort. She felt a tightness across her forehead, and a dizzy sensation in her head, which was not pain, but something more oppressive; and while Mrs Lonsdale and Widow Grey kept up a talk composed of little scraps of village news, she fixed her eyes on a highly-coloured print of the Duke of Wellington on horseback, waving his cocked hat, and it annoyed her to see that the hind legs of the horse were so large and out of proportion with the rest of the picture; but if she had turned away her head she could not have told what she had been looking at. It began to grow dusk, and she wondered

her aunt did not talk of going home, but she did not suggest that it was late ; at last the small talk, after becoming every minute less animated, ceased altogether. Widow Grey drooped her head and looked drowsy, and now and then gave a nod and a little start, and got upright again ; and the scrutinising, anxious glance was resumed, until, after a while, Mrs Lonsdale drew a long breath, and an expression of great satisfaction came suddenly to her face. The sound of foot-falls was heard soon after along the prim centre walk of the old garden. "Come, Nelly, my dear, draw your mantle closer round you, for it is time to be going home."

"Why does she call me Nelly? how strange, how unpleasant from her!" was Eleanor's most distinct thought of the many that were stamping themselves upon heart and brain. She mechanically obeyed, and with a smile accepted a pin from Widow Grey, who begged her to close her mantle well up to her throat.

"Naughty, naughty people!" exclaimed

Mrs Lonsdale, when the little door opened, and Flora entered, followed by Henry Mordaunt.

"It was so lovely that we could not come in before, so you must forgive us for staying out so long," said Henry Mordaunt; but Flora was silent, and her head was turned away.

Mrs Lonsdale was profuse in her thanks to Mrs Grey for her hospitality, and then the four set out on their homeward walk. They passed across the first meadow together, and when they had gone through the small turnstile that led into the corn-field, Flora and Mr Mordaunt were a little in advance. Mrs Lonsdale gave a hard touch to Eleanor's arm, as if to detain her, and made a loud observation on the beauty of the red poppies in the twilight—then, when those in advance had got to a safer distance, she said in a sort of hoarse whisper, which seemed to Eleanor to go through her brain, "A word to the wise, my dear; now it strikes *me* that we

are not wanted, and we had better take our time in our walk."

Had life and hope depended on it, Eleanor at first could make no reply ; but there was in the spirit within that delicate and fragile frame a power of control which the master of empires might have coveted. A brief space, and she had gained that victory, the hardest of all to win,—she was mistress of herself.

She silently followed Mrs Lonsdale, who now began walking slowly along the narrow path, scarcely wide enough for two, between the hedge and the standing corn.

"I cannot have much left to tell to one so sharp as you are, Eleanor, for you must have seen, for this long time, what was going on, though he did try hard to keep his feelings close, poor fellow, which was but natural, till he had seen his way before him a little more clearly."

Mrs Lonsdale paused, and turned her head back as if expecting an answer. Eleanor spoke

as it were within herself the words she was about to use, as if that would give her power to utter them aloud, and then she said, "Is it then all settled?" so calmly and so clearly that the voice appeared to herself to be not her own.

"Why, nothing has been told me yet; but I can have no doubt of it, nor will you when I tell you all."

"What more, Aunt Louisa, have you to tell?"

"Bless me! just look at her, trailing along that nice clean muslin. Why, the stiffness will be all out of it the first time wearing, and I am sure Mrs Cramp will charge eighteen-pence for getting up all those flounces. What an extravagant little puss it is! But I must not scold her about anything *to-night*, Eleanor, must I?"

"You said you had more to tell."

"So I had, if you will have patience. Dear me, what will Mr Barrett say, at finding his

wheat trodden back in that way? You see he will keep by her side, let the path be ever so narrow."

"I want to hear all about it, Aunt Louisa."

"And so you shall, my dear," said her aunt, well pleased to be interrogated; and, deceived by Eleanor's manner, she thought, "Now, after all, I dare say she did not care so very much about him, only she knows that she is not well provided for; and Steyne Rectory would have been such a home. Now, when she sees which way the wind blows, like a wise girl, as she knows she cannot get him for herself, she will make the best of his connection with her cousin. James said one day that she is thoughtful beyond her years, and I begin to believe it." To do her justice, now that she considered her point gained, she wished Eleanor not to be unhappy or disconsolate, or for any unpleasant feeling on her part to cloud the sunshine of her daughter's prospects.

“ Why, my dear, if you must know,—and it is very natural that you should be anxious about it, very natural indeed,—when I was looking out of the window, for the view was very pretty just in the dusk, I saw Henry Mordaunt and my Flora coming round the corner from the side walk, and her hand was in his, and he was giving her *such* a look, as if he were worshipping her. What are you stopping for—what is the matter? Oh, I see.”

Eleanor was stooping down to extricate her dress from the trailing bramble of a blackberry bush. She was a long time about it—a very long time, and Mrs Lonsdale’s patience was nearly exhausted. At last it was done, and they went on again, and she listened to Mrs Lonsdale’s constant flow of talk upon the one subject; and it continued when they got side by side, and crossed the meadows, and went through the gate to the lane, and back to the Rectory, with its shrubby trees raising their tall dark forms in the gathering shades of night.

CHAPTER X.

I'll introduce thee to a single heart,
A human heart.—POLLOCK.

THE evening at length was over. All had separated for the night, and Eleanor was alone. Her chamber door was locked behind her, shutting out all watchful, prying, suspicious eyes ; and in the hour of her spirit's weakness she was alone.

Poor, helpless human creature ! When the earthly hope upon which you have been perhaps unconsciously leaning, as if it were the very staff

of life to support you onwards to your journey's end, has broken like the frail reed that it is, and pierced you, poor mortal, bereft of all self-sustaining power, beggared and hopeless,—where should you be ?

When the moment of relief which solitude brings, waited for with the most intense longing, had come, how was it with Eleanor ? A few steps advanced into the room, her slight form rigid, motionless, erect, she stood with her hands clasped before her, with a stern expression in her deep dark eyes, the lips slightly parted, as if to relieve them from the painful control in which they had aided every feature to remain so long. There stood the high-principled, soaring Eleanor, the despiser of all that is unworthy, the one who unflinchingly and successfully could meet error in another, and combat it till it fled before her,—there stood she, in the hour of her own heart's trial, as one upon whom the sorrowing eyes of guardian angels rest, as one to whom,

closer and closer, comes with malignant hope, the guileful, subtle tempter, knowing so well each undefended part and each portal where treachery from within is ready to open to the hosts of evil the fortress which to human eyes has raised its ramparts in impregnable strength. The fair sunset, with its many radiant hues, has been followed by a lowering night ; dense and heavy thunder-clouds are in the sky, weighing down the earth, and holding it, as it were, in breathless despair. All nature is motionless and oppressed ; even the light stalks of the aspen leaves are still. No refreshing breeze is stirring without that chamber where a spirit's ordeal is begun, and no soft healing thought has come within it. Of all the bitter trials that fall to woman's lot, the bitterest of all to a proud sensitive nature comes when she discovers that the treasure of her love has been given in vain ; and the full tide of that affection which would have met for its object, untiringly, gladly, gratefully, all the struggles

and sorrows of life, returns back upon her own heart with its turbid, troubled waters. To a gentle, loving being such a time is heavy and mournful enough, but to a proud heart it is the very gall of bitterness, and such a heart was Eleanor's ; and in such bitterness her very soul was steeped as thus she stood, not bowing her head in lowly meekness before her destiny, but erect before it. Fearful and trying were the thoughts that passed, not sharply and quickly, but slowly and heavily, through her mind, as if they challenged her reason as well as her feelings, secure of permanent mastery. First came the conviction that she, whose fastidious nature would not seek even a casual acquaintance, nor stoop to court the regard of any, had given the most treasured feelings of her inmost heart, now uncared for, whatever they might once have been, when they should only have been yielded to earnest seeking and to the bowing down of man's whole devotion before her. Was not this a disgrace which the grave itself was

scarcely deep enough to cover? Then, true indeed it was, that one whom she had always looked upon as beneath her had stepped above her, and was become the worshipped idol where she was nothing. And circumstances would call upon her to play a part repugnant to her. A hypocrite must she be, wearing the mask of sympathy and gladness, until she left the scene of trial. The present was all struggle, the future all gloom. Tempter, complete thy almost finished work! And the course of previous events had led her to believe that all was well. He had sought her at one time with an earnestness of regard to which even her unmasked heart could now bear witness. The good before her had been no unhallowed thing deserving to be disappointed, but right, innocent, desirable. A blessing she would have made it to herself and to others, and yet it was denied.

Spirit of evil, rest content with thy victory. What would'st thou more? A bright flash of lightning illumined the whole apartment; a

loud reverberating crash of thunder quickly followed, showing that the storm, having deliberately collected together all its mighty powers, had suddenly burst upon the earth. Flash succeeded flash, with peals loud enough to shake the strongest nerves. Still that statue-like figure in the centre of the room retained its motionless attitude, though the head was bowed.

After the lapse of some minutes, the thunder and lightning ceased, and then large drops began slowly to fall. Eleanor raised her head, as if instinctively to meet the refreshing influence of the rain. Her face was white and fixed as marble; gradually a softened expression stole over it, followed by tears slow and heavy, like the rain-drops that were reviving the burdened earth. A moment after, and she had thrown herself prostrate on the floor, her spirit humbled in the very dust.

Faster and faster fell the abundant shower upon the thirsty ground, and deeper and deeper

sank every better influence into the parched heart, until, in the extremity of its weakness, came strength, and to its despair a healing balm.

More than an hour went by, and the storm had passed away, and Eleanor was once more seated at the window as she had been before, so short a time ago, a silent watcher in the still night. The air was damp and chilly, and, as she closed the window, she seemed to be shutting out all outward things, and giving herself up to close, uninterrupted self-communion. Not now did she gaze on the tall trees, and the shadowy moonlight scene, indulging in reveries at first sweetly vague, and then too bright in their sudden assumption of reality; a few days only had passed, but she had become a different being. It is not time which works the most startling changes in the life within us! One short hour ago, and what was she? She covered her face with her hands and shuddered, and then came calm and grate-

ful tears, for she knew that the keenest sting of her grief now was, not what she had had to bear, but *how* she had borne it.

To sorrow was never 'given the power to destroy or crush us. That is the work of sin alone.

Where was now the haughty pride that had risen against her fate as unmerited? She acknowledged that it was well that against such pride trial had brought its fiercest assaults and proved victorious. Her bosom-sin had been encountered, and had been laid low. It would rise up again to strive with her better self for mastery, but, after such a stroke, what it had been it could be again no more.

She became weary, and a chilly sensation crept over her, and she wrapped her mantle round her, but still she sat on, as one holding an important converse which must not be interrupted; and what can be more important than the communings held, at some seasons of our lives, in the silent chambers of the heart?

She had passed the threshold of self-knowledge, and she would not be content until she had penetrated further, and stood face to face with her real self. Such an interview always brings humiliation of heart, and humiliation of heart is invariably followed by consolation.

* * * * *

The first delicate tints of the dappled dawn are in the eastern sky, and in the soft twilight Eleanor is laid upon her bed in profound repose, forgetful of all things, even of the heart's stern combat. Her countenance is pale as before, and the long dark lashes rest on a moistened cheek ; every feature shows the peculiar exhaustion which follows a mental conflict, and yet the prevailing expression on that still fair face is peace.

CHAPTER XI.

“And from her own she learn’d to melt at others’ woe.”—GRAY.

“YES, Louisa, I repeat it, you could not have a match for your daughter more eligible and desirable in every way. There is not a single objection that the most fastidious person could bring forward, and you must allow me very sincerely to congratulate you.”

And, having said this, Mr Bromley leaned back in his chair, with a rather solemn face, as feeling that he had given his decided sanction to a very important matter.

“Thank you very much, James. The in-

terest you always take in our sweet Flora is very gratifying, and your favourable opinion of the engagement gives me the greatest pleasure. There is only one thing that a little, the least little bit, disturbs me. Is it not all too bright and too good? and do n't you think there may be some drawback behind the scenes?"

"What? the skeleton in the closet. Why, as that is supposed to be a usual, though not presentable, piece of furniture in every house, I should not be surprised if Mordaunt has one somewhere stowed away."

"I do n't mean that exactly. But—but, as to Henry Mordaunt's private fortune, we do n't know anything for certain about that, it is only hearsay. I have looked into that book, I do n't know what you call it, on the shelf there, and have found out that his living is really a good one, but that is only for life, and we all know that life is uncertain."

"Be reasonable in your expectations, which

is the only way to be satisfied and happy. If Mordaunt has nothing but his living, it is amply sufficient for a man to marry upon, and he could insure his life for a settlement."

"But I hope, James, that he has more than that, for my child ought to do well. Miss Henderson had not half her beauty, and think what a match she made! At all events, I should like everything thoroughly understood at once, not to go on engaging the poor thing's affections, and then have such an affair as Miss Freeman's; why, everything was ready, the very cake in the house, and they do say that the waiters had actually begun to lay the tables for the breakfast, when something happened with those lawyers, who are always putting a stop to everything, and the match was off."

Mr Bromley looked at his sister with the grave eye of a philosopher. "You remind me, Louisa, of what Walter Scott says very justly about success and failure—

“ ‘ Show him where at the goal are set
Keen disappointment and regret,
This disenchants the winner's eyes
And robs—— ’ ”

“ I really beg your pardon, James, for interrupting you, but let us talk of the business seriously, for there is no time to lose. I am all in a twitter, expecting every moment the hall bell to ring.”

“ Then,” said Mr Bromley, good-humouredly, “ we will keep to the point most strictly. You are quite right to wish everything understood at once; it is better for the happiness of all parties. I must beg you clearly to understand that I am satisfied with what we already know, for your friend, the Liber Ecclesiasticus, is no gossiping exaggerator, but, on the contrary, keeps even within the mark; still, as you are your child's natural guardian, if there be any doubt of any kind upon your mind, talk openly with Mordaunt, as now you have a right to do, and satisfy yourself at once.”

7 Mrs Lonsdale looked down, and played nervously with her eye-glass.

“But, James, I really do n’t think I am equal to talking openly with Henry Mordaunt. I am almost sure it would bring on an attack of tic ; now you promised you would ask him to dinner, and I should be so relieved if, over your wine, you would contrive to sound him yourself ; I am sure you would do it so much better than I could, and you understand business so well, and men always open more easily to men than they do to us.”

Mr Bromley winced a little at this proposal, for he was as little inclined for such a conversation as herself. He was not a man to promise or to refuse anything quickly ; so he considered for a little while, and Mrs Lonsdale watched him with every feature anxiously working ; at last the balance preponderated in favour of compliance, for he felt that his sister had said truly, that he would do it better than she

could; she might say something injudicious, and perhaps spoil everything.

“I will do what I can for you, Louisa, if Mordaunt gives me a fair opening.”

This was not quite so satisfactory as it might have been, but it was spoken with that decided air which puts an end to a discussion; so Mrs Lonsdale was fain to be content with it, and she retired to the drawing-room. She had scarcely reached it when the hall door-bell rang; she waited impatiently for the expected announcement, but none was made, and, on inquiry, she heard that Mr Mordaunt had arrived, but had asked for Mr Bromley, and been shown into his study at once. How delightful this was! How *real*! A proposal had actually been made; conversation was at that very moment going on about it. She forgot all suspicions of doubtful private property, all thoughts of Miss Freeman's disappointment, and went to seek Flora, and pass away

the time with her, until Mr Mordaunt should emerge from the mysterious study.

The same loud peal which had brought to Mrs Lonsdale such pleasurable excitement fell with a far different sound upon another ear. Rouse yourself, Eleanor, and come forth from that solitude, now so dangerous to you ! Come forth with the firm step and the tearless eye, and appear to those about you even as you were before, unchanged—yes, *unchanged* ! though your hope has been as a spider's web, and your welfare has passed away like a cloud.

A strong necessity prevailed over the feeling that exertion was impossible, and Eleanor put on her bonnet and came down-stairs, intending to walk to the village. As she passed down the shady avenue, she saw Mrs Lonsdale and Flora seated on a pleasant rustic chair under a tree, smiling and talking eagerly ; no doubt they were continuing the all-engrossing happy subject. Eleanor's heart was stirred within

her, but not with envy, and, strange as it appeared to herself, a gentle sympathy, without bitterness, took possession of her, and she hailed its coming with gratitude, and then it was followed by a dreary, desolate sense of loneliness. She saw Flora pouring her gladsome confidence into a mother's rejoicing ears; the one never wearied of telling what the other was never weary of hearing. What pleasanter talk could there be on earth than this? And for her, there was no mother's tender love to fill the aching void; no sister's gentle, though unspoken, sympathy, ever watching to soothe where no grief has been confessed, ever comprehending what the tongue has never uttered;—such spirits there are, though they bear human forms, and they hover about us as guardian angels do, ministering, though they speak no words.

Sad it seemed to Eleanor that she could not go to those two under the tree and join in their conversation, as, under other circum-

stances, would be so natural, bringing the gratifying sympathy or the readily appreciated raillery usual on such occasions ; but such must not, could not be, and she went on her way alone. The walk appeared so long, and the weather so oppressive,—it was one of those heavy days when there is great heat, and but little sunshine,—that she became tired before she reached Sally Jennings's cottage ; so she turned into a meadow and mechanically took advantage of the first resting-place that presented itself,—a block of roughly-hewn stone, which had fallen from the upright position in which it had formerly served as one of the supports of a hay-rick. The scene before her was dull in the extreme, and, with such a choice of pretty spots as the lovely village of Carstone afforded, no one, who had thought at all about it, would have chosen it. But there are some moods in which outward things appear to have no influence ; and such was Eleanor's now. The dull blank wall of the

barn at a little distance, the stagnant pond nearer, in the corner of the meadow, surrounded by rude broken-down rails, towards which a lean, miserable-looking cow was slowly making her way, with feet sticking more heavily into the clay at every step, and lazily extricated to sink again still deeper; the gnats flying just above the surface of the water in monotonous circles, wearying to the eye; all this was as little regarded as the most charming landscape would have given pleasure. She was resting, and she was alone—and she required no more. A lethargy of feeling oppressed her, the sensation which, in the delicately-constituted, so often follows a severe mental struggle. The main-spring of life was broken, and it could not but be that its restless wheels should be still. Ah, Eleanor, know you what life really is, and what is its true main-spring,—that which no earthly sorrow and no earthly power can break? Alas! there are great, plain truths which it takes us poor

blind mortals a long time to learn. How many must look back to the troubles of their past lives, and marvel that they used not the balm made ready for their hands! Weighed down by the sultry air and the deadness of her own spirit, Eleanor sat on, in her dreary listlessness, wasting the time that had been intended for the solace of another, and yet doing herself no good. At last the sun broke through the misty heat, and shone down upon her with a force that was unbearable. She rose from her exposed seat. It seemed a relief that anything had come to rouse her, and she remembered Jane's sick-bed, and slowly walked from the meadow into the lane. One of the great blessings of a habit of studying others is, that it so readily presents itself as an antidote to our selfish sorrow. A few steps took her to the entrance of Sally Jennings's untidy cottage, and she was soon taken up the miserable staircase by the mother to her daughter's room. A request that she might

be left alone to sit quietly with the invalid was complied with, rather sullenly, and Sally went down again, making the creaking step give a louder sound than when she had come up. Jane's bed was raised but a little way from the floor, and covered with a patchwork counterpane, faded and soiled; her head was lying very low upon a wretched excuse for a bolster; and like the king of old in his sumptuous palace, her face was turned to the wall. By the bed side, on an old oak box, worm-eaten at the corners, stood a jug without spout or handle, at the bottom of which lay some black-currant jam, which had slightly coloured the water which had been poured upon it. A band-box in one corner of the room, with the rim broken off nearly all round it, and hanging down, probably contained some of poor Jane's Sunday finery, in her careless happy days, when the village beauty, like other beauties in the first glow of life, was full of triumphant hope and the flush of conquest.

The roof was low and slanting, and it helped to make the room warm to a depressing degree. The little lattice was closed; and the sun, now high in the heavens, threw upon the panes a scorching heat that seemed to burn like fire. Here, without the resources of education for the mind, or the slightest chance of change of air for the sinking frame, lay one ill in body and broken in spirit, a lesson to her who gazed upon her. Precious things are to be learned in the dwellings of the poor, particularly by those who *love* them!

Jane made no effort to speak to her visitor, and did not even appear to notice that she was present. Eleanor went to the window, and, turning the hot, rusty iron handle, threw open the lattice. The relief gained was very trifling, but still it was relief; and Eleanor saw that Jane's feverish eyes were following her movements. She returned and sat down on the corner of the bed, for chair there was none.

how I ought to get up and be well again for very shame. You want to talk like the neighbours talk, only to do it like the Sunday school, and I don't want none of it. I want to be left quiet. I 'spose everybody may die if they choose, when their time is come."

Eleanor was depressed and weary, and the sight before her moved her sympathies most painfully. Her eyes were filled with tears, and she suffered them to flow silently, while Jane looked at her with her large hollow eyes full of bewildered surprise.

"Jane," at last she said, in a tone of touching kindness, "you are judging yourself too harshly, and if others have so judged you they are wrong, very wrong ; nothing could be more natural than that you should have suffered and grieved very much, for your sorrow does not come from an idle conceited fancy of your own, which it would have been wrong to have mourned about ; but this man did all he could to win your love, and everybody thought that he would

be your husband. He had no right to leave you for another, and when he did, it must have been a bitter grief to you, and so it would have been to any woman, were she a queen upon her throne ; no one, Jane, should blame you for this sorrow ; and you are not strong, you never were, and a bad cold which you neglected has brought this sad illness, which your mother always feared for you. Illness and distress of mind are very bad to bear, poor girl, but you must not add shame to them, for you have no cause to be ashamed because another has injured you."

Jane was looking at Eleanor all this time quietly and gratefully, and there was an expression on her pale face of that relief which a sense of being understood always brings.

And then Eleanor's voice became more gentle still, as she showed Jane that it was wrong to neglect herself, and not to try to bear any affliction that came upon her, and bade her remember her mother's distress and despair.

And then in a softly persuasive tone she pleaded the necessity of forgiveness, going on to speak of things of deepest moment, faithfully and earnestly, as the heart speaks to the heart. She seemed, to Jane in her loneliness, as some being from another world, as she sat by her side, made so lovely by her tender womanly pity.

At length she rose to go, and with a faint entreaty that she would come again Jane turned her face again to the wall and closed her eyes.

Eleanor would fain have left the cottage, at once to breathe the free air, and to be again alone, had not the mute distress of poor Sally, who was sitting unoccupied in the chimney corner, detained her for some little time. When again she set forth, it was with a stronger step than when she had entered the cottage, and deep thoughts were within her, very different from the dreary stagnation which had been in heart and mind before. She was again in her room alone, but the feeling of

loneliness had departed, and she almost marvelled at the strength of body and of spirit that had returned. She was grateful that Sunday had intervened, before she was called upon to meet one whom it was her imperative duty now to teach herself to meet with indifference.

Humility is the soil prepared for the springing up of every high endeavour,—for all that we may ever claim of dignity of soul; and this dignity now was hers, this proper self-reliance, which is never so much to be relied on as when we have learned how much to distrust ourselves. In a cool, white dress, with her glossy black hair smoothly folded back from her unruffled brow, with a firm step, and an unfaltering manner, she went down at once to the drawing-room, prepared to meet Henry Mordaunt in his new character, either with Flora or alone. He was alone, standing at the window and looking out upon the lawn. He turned round as she entered, and as he advanced

to meet her there was something of hesitation, almost of embarrassment, in his address. Why was this? He had wavered between them. With the natural quickness of woman's instinct, Eleanor had suspected this before. She was sure of it now. Her breath came thick and fast, her heart beat tumultuously, and yet she was outwardly very calm. She made her manner as cordial as she could, but it did not appear to her, at the moment, that she was called upon to congratulate him in words; at all events, she was conscious that any she could command would be inappropriate, so she was silent. After they had shaken hands he did not speak, and a silence ensued, which she was far from having intended, and which she would have given anything for the power to break. At last, in a very confused way, he said :

“ Miss Stuart, how happy it makes me to—to—”

What he would have added Eleanor was not destined to hear, for the door opened, and

Flora entered, blushing, radiant, lovely. A little cloud was on her face when she perceived Eleanor, but it soon passed away. Mr Bromley and Mrs Lonsdale immediately followed, for the delicate hand of the *pendule* was pointing to the punctual minute for the announcement of dinner. They went into the dining-room, the engaged lovers arm-in-arm, in all the openess of their acknowledged affection. Eleanor was in a confusion of ideas which she could not understand. Henry Mor-daunt seemed lower in her eyes than he had been before, and yet, why should this be? The thing lost is said to increase in value; then why should this be? After dinner, glad of any motive for exertion, she went to the store-room to study any cooling drinks that would be refreshing to poor Jane. Mrs Lonsdale, who with cheerful alacrity had given her the key, shortly followed her, evidently full of something that was very gratifying to her. Eleanor did not, as before, feel her presence a burden,

she prepared herself to listen willingly to what she had to say. It seemed strange to her that at such a time her heart felt so softened towards her.

“My dear,” she began, “I am so pleased with Henry Mordaunt’s interview with your uncle.”

Eleanor sat down on the steps which were used to gain access to the upper shelves, and with a pot of barberry jam in her hand looked attentively at her aunt.

“It was so handsome of him to open about his affairs at once to your uncle, who had not to ask him a single question. His living is seven hundred and fifty pounds a year, and his own money in the funds is five hundred a year (I heard it was four); and besides that, he has expectations from an uncle in the West Indies, who has as good as promised to make him his heir, and he expects nothing with Flora,—only *herself*, as he very prettily said; and he has offered what your uncle calls a most

liberal sentiment, and he has told us all about his family. His grandfather was bishop of somewhere, I must ask your uncle again, for I forget where, and his mother a niece of Lord Paget's ; I always knew he must be a man of family. And he told me he would keep a riding horse for Flora, if she will only venture to learn to ride, which I am sure I hope she will, for she would look so pretty on horseback. Now is not all this very delightful for her ? ”

“ Very, Aunt Louisa, very.”

“ And I am so sorry, my dear, to hear from your uncle that you can't be persuaded to stay over Thursday ; but soon you *must* come back to us again, for, of course, when a man has an income, and a house, and everything, we can't think there can be much delay ; we shall want you here, I am sure, bad enough, and I shall often write to you about the fashions, so be sure you keep your eyes open whenever you pass by a shop ; and be sure to go and see all the weddings, which I hear is

quite the fashion for people to do in Bath. Your uncle says that he never lets you leave him without taking you to Mountjoy, so you are to go there on Wednesday. Ah, my dear, I don't wonder at your looking so downcast when you hear of Mountjoy, but you know you always like to go there."

"Yes, I like to go to Mountjoy."

"And the weather is so beautiful for it now, that I dare say Henry Mordaunt and Flora would like to go too. Of course they would like to go anywhere so that they are together. I must leave you now to do your jobs, for I have to finish a long letter to your aunt, to tell her all about it. She will be so astonished, for she asked me in her last letter, which I had only last Wednesday, if there was n't something between Henry Mordaunt and you, and if that was not the reason why you were so long in coming back. Now I must go, or I shall stand talking here till tea-time. Take care of the key, and give it to me when you

have done, and mind you do n't forget to lock the door."

She was gone, and Eleanor sat motionless where she had left her, until the sun had set, and the lengthening shadows of the twilight fell upon the little floor.

CHAPTER XII.

"But O! how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes."—*As You Like It*.

"WHAT! the ladies all at home? very glad to hear it."

And Mr Hollowdean jumped down from his gig, having resigned the reins to the shabby groom.

"How are you? How are you? How are you?" said he, giving a rapid greeting in the same words to the three ladies in turn. When he had been ushered into the drawing-room, Mrs Lonsdale, in a very gracious mood, pointed to a chair near her, in which he seated

himself, and then placing a hand upon each knee, he gave a stedfast look at Flora, accompanied by a smile, and a moving of his head slowly from side to side, indicative of his knowing more than she was aware of; Flora blushed, and to Eleanor's surprise looked not at all ill-pleased. The Squire having thus reconnoitred and discovered that he would be on safe ground, took courage to say that about which he had before been doubtful.

"I have driven all the way from Hollowdean, Miss Lonsdale, to offer you my humble congratulations, and to wish—ahem—to wish all that is wished on such occasions. I heard the news with very great pleasure, very great pleasure indeed, for though not a marrying man myself (and he glanced sideways at Eleanor), I heartily approve of the practice in others."

"How exceedingly kind of you—very friendly indeed. I am sure we are very much obliged to you," said the smiling Mrs Lonsdale.

"A pretty little mistress will be a great im-

provement to Steyne Rectory," pursued the Squire.

Flora laughed and looked very much gratified.

"But what will Miss Headington do, eh, Miss Stuart? I thought she meant to look upon Mordaunt as her property, while she stayed in the country. Fine doings these of yours, Miss Flora; you will have to answer for them, I can tell you."

Mr Hollowdean was quite in exuberant spirits, and it was evident that the event upon which he came to congratulate others was by no means displeasing to himself. And so he continued his bantering, which was as well received as it was readily given. Eleanor replied to his remarks when necessary, but the smile was gone from her lip, the light from her eye, and his rough *badinage*, instead of being, as at other times, gaily returned, was like a ball thrown to a sick child and suffered to lie unheeded at its feet. But this was of no

consequence to the Squire of Hollowdean ; if his ball were not flung back to him, he ran after it and picked it up. On this occasion he was sufficient to himself.

He was not a frequent morning caller, as few men are ; but when he did come, he sat a long time, which he called compounding for the assessed taxes. Eleanor, therefore, knew that this talk must be endured for some time, and she tried to bear it well, though her cheeks were burning and her hands as cold as ice. A diversion was nearer at hand than she supposed, for the well-worn gig of Mr Hollowdean had to move on, and give place to an elegant fashionable carriage and pair ; and after a summons from the hall-bell, which could be heard even in the outhouses of Carstone Rectory, Miss Headington was announced, and immediately threw every other person into the shade with her gay, stylish dress and vivacious manners.

“ I am the bearer, Mrs Lonsdale, of a

thousand and one apologies from mamma for not having returned your call, but really she cannot venture out in the heat, for it seems to bring on all kinds of maladies. What a pity it is that they don't visit in the evening in England, as they do in France. It would be vastly more agreeable."

"I can't say that I am of your opinion there," said Mr Hollowdean. "A man likes to be quiet after his dinner, and to have a snug nap if he chooses, after being out in the open air all day."

"Bless the man, were you ever of my opinion upon any one subject? As for your naps that you think so much about, the sooner you are disturbed out of them the better. I should uphold my visiting plan for that reason, if for no other, that it would prevent men from turning into great senseless logs between their wine and their tea, and driving their poor wives melancholy-mad from the want of somebody to speak to."

“As for you,” growled the Squire, “if you had nobody else, you would dig a hole and talk into that, like the barber of somebody, I forget his name.”

Miss Headington laughed merrily, and surveyed Mr Hollowdean through her eye-glass.

“There is hope of all things. You have turned mythological; the next step, and you will be poetical. There are two words, I am sure, enough to drive you from the room. But, Mrs Lonsdale, I came here to have a good chat with you, and not to argue with Mr Hollowdean; so pray let us begin, and talk so fast that he won’t be able to get in a word edgeways.”

“With much pleasure,” said Mrs Lonsdale, “but I am afraid all the news must come from you; for we (and she gave a well-satisfied smile) have nothing to tell you.”

“Nothing to tell! why I have heard something about you which has made my head ache ever since half-past six last evening, when my brother, singularly, unmindful of my feel-

ings, without the slightest preparation, told me suddenly that the only beau within our sensible horizon (I beg your pardon, Mr Hollowdean, I forgot you), was going to be married; and he expressed it just in those blunt, painful words, like that uncouth being who got soundly cuffed by Cleopatra, and in my opinion he richly deserved it too. Now to-day, as soon as my headache was better, I ordered the carriage, and drove here as fast as the horses could bring me, not to congratulate you, you little minx (and she looked at Flora), but in the hope of finding out that the news is not true, of which there is a little chance, as it reached my brother through a vulgar channel. He heard it from his own man, who heard it from the laundress on Carstone Hill."

"Vulgar channels are most to be relied upon," observed Mr Hollowdean.

"No man, I dare say, better calculated to give an opinion upon them than yourself," returned she.

“How, how? what do you mean? explain yourself, Miss Headington.”

“Not I,—I never took the trouble to explain myself in my life.”

“If ladies can’t be witty without being rude,” muttered he, “they had better put their wit in their pockets, and keep it there, say I.”

“I really beg your pardon, Mr Hollow-dean,” said Miss Headington, good-humouredly; “I ought not to have said what I did, as it could be misunderstood, but you know my habit of speaking without thinking. I simply meant that you are more likely than some to be able to judge of the value of such people’s opinions, as you study those beneath you more than many gentlemen do, but not a bit more than they ought. Are you satisfied?”

“Quite, quite,” responded the Squire, heartily; “your speech does you honour, Miss Headington, and if every explanation had been as frankly given as yours, many a pistol shot would never have been fired.”

"Only think from what I have saved myself! What a lucky speech of mine, was it not, Miss Stuart?"

Eleanor was sitting with her back to the light, and her face slightly turned from the speakers; she started when thus immediately addressed, for she had been feeling like the spectator of some strange scene, in which she was expected to take no part. How senseless seemed the question, how impossible to find an answer, and yet before how rarely had she been at fault.

Miss Headington never waited long for a reply; so, turning to Mrs Lonsdale, she said, "Now, do ease my mind at once, dear Mrs Lonsdale, and tell me, is this true, or is it not?"

Mrs Lonsdale looked all smiles and delighted mystery.

"Ah, I see, you need tell me no more. Farewell to the six weeks' amusement I promised myself. Miss Lonsdale, what do you expect to come to?" A little more of such nonsense, and Miss Headington fluttered from

the room as conspicuously as she had entered it, escorted to her carriage by Mr Hollowdean, whose good spirits led him to this unwonted act of gallantry towards her.

“Do you know I was so surprised,” she said to him from the carriage, when he had handed her in, “for he did not pay her any attention at our party. I thought he looked much more as if he admired Miss Stuart, but men are so deceitful, if you will excuse me for boring you with such a world-old saying. I don’t think there is much in Miss Lonsdale.”

“Ha, ha, ha,” and the Squire laughed his loudest, “you are all alike, I see; one may as well expect a rat to love a ferret, as one woman to admire another if she is engaged to be married.”

“You horrid creature, what makes you in such spirits? why, you are down upon one like a steam-hammer. I see how it is,—we shall be hearing of a second wedding, now that a little

mistake about a rival, without which a courtship would be dreadfully stupid, has been cleared up."

"Hey! hey! what do you mean, what do you mean?" exclaimed Mr Hollowdean, very red in the face. "I tell you, as I have told everybody, that I have a nephew to keep up the name of the Hollowdeans of Hollowdean, and *I am not a marrying man.*"

"Home," said Miss Headington to the footman, and, with a bow and a provoking smile of incredulity, she drove off.

In the commotion attending Miss Headington's departure, Eleanor escaped from the drawing-room.

When Mr Hollowdean returned, he gave one long searching look all round the room, taking in the remotest corners, and then, with a disappointed look, he began talking with the ladies still remaining.

"Have you ever been to Mountjoy, Mr Hollowdean?" asked Mrs Lonsdale.

“ Been to Mountjoy ? of course I have, times out of number ; why, the hounds met there once a week last winter. Been to Mountjoy ? why I should think I knew every stock and stone upon the road, and every door and window in the place.”

“ Then I suppose you would not care to go there again ? ”

“ That depends, my dear madam, that depends, as everything else does, upon circumstances.”

“ All I meant was, that we intend going there to-morrow, on a kind of pic-nic drive, just among ourselves, you know. And we have asked Mr Mordaunt to come, because he has never seen the place (Mr Hollowdean shook his head at Flora), and if you would like to join us we shall be very happy to see you ; only I am afraid you will find it rather dull escorting ladies about and walking their pace, for I know how you like to get over the country.”

"I shall be very glad to come, upon my honour, very glad indeed. I'll drive over from Hollowdean, and meet you there at any time and place you like to appoint; and I'll see what my old woman at home can do in the way of making up a hamper, on a twinkling-of-a-bed-post-sort of notice."

"No, you are very kind, but I insist upon your doing nothing of the sort. I shall take dinner for my friends, only you must come and make us a little cheerful; for poor Eleanor always feels going to Mountjoy, poor dear, for she was born there, and her father had the living. Mr Bromley takes her there every summer, to prevent her having the melancholy feeling that she had at first, that she could not bear to see the place again."

"And a capital good plan of Mr Bromley's; I honour him for his common sense; I hate everything melancholy; and I'll bring some bottles of spruce Devonshire cider, that go off like a revolver when the cork is drawn, enough

to keep up anybody's spirits. Name your hour and your trysting tree. I suppose I must talk a little bit in the romantic line to suit you, eh, Miss Flora ? ”

“ Why, it is a long drive, which will take us two hours, and Mr Bromley never likes his breakfast out of the way before ten. Suppose we say that we will meet at half-past twelve at the old mill ? ”

“ So it shall be,” said the Squire, rising; and taking a cordial leave, he departed.

“ I thought it better to ask him, my dear,” said Mrs Lonsdale to Flora ; “ for really I think he seems struck with Eleanor ; and it would be a very good thing for her to get a home of her own, for I do n't think she is over-comfortable in Bath.”

“ Yes, mamma, but Mr Hollowdean is such a very queer man, and so rough.”

“ Nonsense about men being queer or rough. I dare say he would make a very good husband, and everybody can't expect your good for-

tune." Flora made no reply, for she was listening to a sound, which was as the sweetest of all music to her ears, the clicking of the gate as it was opened, and the trampling of a horse's hoofs up the avenue.

CHAPTER XIII.

" 'T was an afternoon in summer ;
Very hot and still the air was,
Very smooth the gliding river,
Motionless the sleeping shadows :
Insects glistened in the sunshine,
Insects skated on the water,
Filled the drowsy air with buzzing."
Song of Hiawatha.

MR BROMLEY was not a sort of man to enjoy meals in the open air, and therefore, when he found out that what he had intended to be a quiet drive and a pleasant stroll about the grounds of Mountjoy Castle had been converted into a kind of pic-nic, he managed to get out of the expedition altogether, im-

provided a touch of rheumatism, and ordered a snug dinner at home, of which a black cock, sent to him from a college friend in the North, formed the principal attraction.

It was a heavy, still, hot morning, holding out the chance of a bright sunny afternoon. Henry Mordaunt rode over from Steyne in time to join the party at breakfast, uninvited, not at all to the satisfaction of Mr Bromley, who liked to be quite early in the morning, and whose principle it was never to go anywhere without an invitation. Though he had studied human nature, and was well versed in the opinions of Nicole, Rochefoucault, &c., he did not yet understand that lovers are liable to forget the conventionalities which before they respected, and to consult chiefly their own pleasure. Punctually at half-past ten the carriage started, and Henry Mordaunt had been easily persuaded to leave his horse at Carstone, and to take the vacant seat afforded by the defection of Mr Bromley, whose ab-

sence was in truth regretted by Eleanor alone, who wished fervently that she could have followed his example, and have made any excuse to save herself from a most trying and wearisome day.

The country did not look beautiful, at least not to her eyes ; a thick haze obscured distant objects, and often they had to drive along straight dusty roads, shut in by high hedges primly cut, and not at all picturesque. But for the prospect around them Eleanor did not care ; had it been lovely, it would have given her no pleasure. Yet she did not feel now that dreary oppression which had weighed her down when seated alone in the meadow. Henry Mordaunt was before her, and his presence gave an impetus to her spirit, and armed her with all of woman's pride, and innate sensitive delicacy to guard her from the shadow of suspicion. In such a position she had something to strive for, and she was true to herself. One thing she could not help ob-

serving as they drove along ; Flora was improving, even in that short time. The sunshine of her happy love seemed to be expanding her ideas, and giving her a higher tone. She would rise to him then, and he would not descend to her. If it were so, it would be well for both, and Eleanor's nobler nature, triumphing over self, wished that it might be so, and that one, to her mind the ideal of all that man ought to be, might ennoble her whom he had chosen, and make her, the easily-moulded, worthy of himself.

Eleanor was thinking very deeply, and glad that no one tried to make her talk, when a turn in the road brought them suddenly upon the fine scenery of Mountjoy, looking all the more lovely from the contrast it presented to the monotonous road along which they had come. The village was situated in a valley surrounded by gently undulating hills, covered with the richest verdure. The most striking feature in the landscape was the magnificent growth of the

trees, which gave even to two or three meadows lying together a park-like appearance, and which, while spreading their grateful shade and luxuriant beauty in every direction, were collected in dense masses, or in groups of towering grandeur, on the higher grounds and lovely slopes in the immediate vicinity of Mountjoy Castle.

As each familiar object met Eleanor's eye, to her heart came a sensation of acute pain. There are few feelings more sad than those which we experience when returning in sorrow to the well-remembered scenes, where our untried youth has revelled in such gladsome hopes, as scarcely the brightest of earth's fulfilled realities could gratify, and where all things have seemed possible to the nerve which has never been weakened, to the heart which has never been "smitten and withered like grass," to the spirit which has never been broken. If that chilling blight, disappointment, has fallen upon our affections, upon our ambition, or upon any of

the aims of life, nowhere do we feel it more deeply than in the haunts of our buoyant childhood.

* * * *

"There he is, I declare, how punctual, waiting for us. Don't you see the gig, just close to the mill?" exclaimed Mrs Lonsdale, as the careful coachman, with his drag on, slowly descended the hill. Eleanor's eyes were fixed on the church tower, embosomed in trees; but she now lowered them, and they rested upon Mr Hollowdean, seated in his gig, which he had drawn up under the shade of a large horse-chestnut near the mill. He was amusing himself with protecting his horse's ears from the flies with his whip.

"Capital for ladies, upon my word," he exclaimed as they came nearer; "I have not been here five minutes. What is the order of the day? A walk first, and then dinner, and then another walk, I suppose? First we must see to our cattle. There is no choice where to

put up, as there is but one public house in the place."

"And quite enough for its size," observed Mr Mordaunt.

"I do n't know about that," responded the Squire. "I like horses well looked after, which they are sure to be where there is competition, and I am no enemy to a respectable public house where a poor man may make himself a bit sociable, as well as his betters, who have their clubs and everything this world can give."

"That is all very well, but —"

"Oh, pray, gentlemen, do n't begin talking like the newspaper," interposed Mrs Lonsdale. "We are so terribly warm just here, that we had better have the horses put up anywhere, and go somewhere into the shade."

"A very good proposal, carried *nem. con.*," said Mr Hollowdean. "I never trust anybody to see after my horse but myself, so if

you will take care of the ladies till I come back, Mordaunt, I won't be very long. Stay, I'll join you in the rookery."

The ladies willingly left the carriage, and, escorted by Mr Mordaunt, ascended the zig-zag path which led to the rookery, while Mr Hollowdean and the coachman departed together in very good fellowship.

It was so warm and close a day that it was scarcely a relief even to get into the shade.

"Let us sit down here and wait for Mr Hollowdean," said Eleanor, languidly, and she pointed to a large stone nearly covered with moss, close to which the rank hemlock and large, darkly-tinted stinging nettles were growing.

"What a place! No, not there—let us come higher up, where we can catch a glimpse of the Rectory," said Flora.

"Well, you go on then," returned Mrs Lonsdale. "I am as tired as Eleanor, and I shall rest here, for there is something very

heavy in the weather. Flora went on quickly, up the narrow path, followed by her willing companion. Once Eleanor looked up at them, and she saw Henry Mordaunt eagerly leaning forward to hold back a branch of hawthorn that Flora might pass with ease ; a fine glow of exercise was on her face, and she was giving him a bright gladsome smile in return for his little service. Eleanor looked down, and began pushing with her foot the decayed stalks of a last-year's nettle, and went on till she had disengaged them from their dried-up root.

Mr Hollowdean was true to his word ; he very soon joined them.

“What, here all alone!” he exclaimed, laughing ; “not that I expected anything else. A poor sort of a beau you have had, I am afraid—eh, Miss Stuart? I think, for my part, that an engaged man ought to have a peculiar sort of hatchment put up in his parish church till he is married, to tell the world that for the time being he is dead for all the use he

might be to it. Ha, ha, ha!" and he stood with his hands in his pockets, and laughed heartily at his own jest. "You do n't seem quite up to the mark to-day, Miss Stuart," he added, disappointed at her unusual want of appreciation. "But I do n't wonder at it, sitting here and hearing nothing but the rooks going caw, caw, caw. This won't do for me; let us come on and look out a place where we can have our dinner. If some of us can live upon love, I can't. I told Stacey and my Jem to come up here with the hampers, and to follow us, and set them down wherever the ladies like to cry 'halt.'"

"How very thoughtful of you," said Mrs Lonsdale, rising. "Come, Eleanor, let us go on now, as Mr Hollowdean wishes it."

"Bless me," said he, as they proceeded, "what a state this place is in. I wish young Allan would come here and have all these hemlocks and stinging nettles grubbed up. Why, it would give a poor man work for a week.

Now I dare say those who went on before us took all the nettles for dock-leaves, and did n't find them sting a bit."

He looked down in Eleanor's face for the expected smile, usually so ready to enter into a good joke, or mischievously to denounce a bad one, but it was not there, and he went on, walking faster and whistling to himself in a very low key, which he supposed was not heard.

"Here is the place, here is the very thing," he exclaimed, when they had gained the top of the rising ground, and saw beneath them a lovely view of the Rectory, embedded in trees, with its well-kept lawn extending to the river. "Here, this will do, won't it? with these large beech-trees over our heads, and a flat place here to put the plates and dishes on. Capital, nothing could be better. Do n't you think so, Mrs Lonsdale?"

"Certainly I do, we could not do better."

Eleanor would have preferred any place to the one chosen with that view before them, but

she uttered no objection, for her head ached from the sultry, still air, and she felt that she could not bear Mr Hollowdean's arguments on the advantages of that spot over all others. Forming his fore-finger and thumb into a kind of trumpet, Mr Hollowdean summoned the men with the hampers, whom he had descried at a little distance, and having given them further directions, he walked on with the ladies, to stroll about till dinner was ready. After some time Henry Mordaunt and Flora joined them, and they returned together to the selected place. Everything was left to the servants by all but Mr Hollowdean, who said that he considered half the pleasure of dining in the open air consisted in making oneself useful. So he proceeded to cut up a large cucumber, very vigorously mixing with it a composition for salad, prepared in a bottle which he drew out of his pocket. "A very bad specimen of the tribe, even worse than ordinary," he whispered to Eleanor, half glancing behind him to the

place where, at a little distance, the lovers were conversing in low, earnest tones. "I always feel a kind of damper upon me in the company of engaged people, as if myself were not myself, and nothing I said was worth listening to. But presently I intend to make the conversation general, you see if I do n't."

They sat down upon the grass, and Eleanor tried to eat, but a choking sensation was in her throat, and her eyes were constantly resting on that familiar home which lay beneath them, in its summer robe of beauty, and her thoughts were sadly contrasting the present with the past.

"Well, I do n't think I have felt such a day as this all the summer," said Mr Hollowdean, taking off his hat and throwing it down. "I wish the sun would but come out, then it would not be half so bad. Look there, Mordaunt, did you ever see anything like that river? it looks too languid to creep along, just like a huge eel gone to sleep. Was there much fishing in it when you lived here, Miss Stuart?"

“ Yes, a great deal ; sometimes very fine jack were caught in it, much finer than I have seen anywhere else.”

“ But most things we have in our childhood appear to us better than what we meet with afterwards,” said Henry Mordaunt.

“ But I believe this to be a fact, and no imagination,” returned Eleanor, with something of her old light tone, “ and Mr Hollowdean, who is a good judge of fish, had better come some day and put it to the test.”

After this Eleanor wondered at the ease with which she was able to continue the conversation, until they all rose with the intention of walking in Mountjoy Park.

Unwearied, incapable of fatigue, seemed that happy couple, soon leaving the others behind, and sometimes lost to view, and sometimes appearing again in the distance amidst the lovely forest scenery. Eleanor walked along as one in a painful dream ; she knew that Mr Hollowdean was

giving her minute accounts of pole-cats and weasels, and other creatures destructive to game ; a conversation suggested by seeing their skeletons and half-decaying bodies nailed up near the keeper's lodge ; and she knew that she was giving him answers of some kind, and that was all.

The gardener was quite an old friend of hers, so they had no difficulty in getting admission into the gardens of the Castle. After they had well inspected them, Mrs Lonsdale proposed going on to a romantic wilderness which lay beyond the pleasure grounds. Eleanor, completely wearied, sank down upon a seat, under a splendid weeping ash, saying :

" I am too tired to go further. I will rest a little. Go with my aunt, if you please, Mr. Hollowdean, and never mind me."

" Suppose I prefer remaining here," said the Squire, meaningly, and he sat down beside her.

Mrs Lonsdale turned round, and said that she

really should be glad to stop from talking, and to stroll on by herself, as they were so lazy ; so on she went.

“ Did you think for a moment, Miss Stuart, that I would go on when I had a chance of remaining with you ? ” and in the Squire’s voice there was even more meaning than before. Eleanor had taken off her bonnet, to relieve the dull, heavy pain over her temples ; her raven hair was pushed back from her forehead ; and the face thus fully seen was very lovely, in the eyes of Mr Hollowdean, spite of its pallid hue and weary expression ; and in it he discovered all that a man could desire to have by his sacred hearth-stone. Yet as he gazed at her long and earnestly, on those unconscious features he perceived no embarrassment, and, being possessed of clear straightforward sense, he saw no hope ; so, as it has happened with many a man before him, the words which had come from his heart to

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his lips went back again, and never found utterance.

"Mr Hollowdean," said Eleanor, after they had sat some time in silence, "I want to go to the church, and you will leave me there, if you please, and find my aunt. I will meet you at the lodge, at the time she fixed."

Mr Hollowdean rose without speaking, and offered her his arm.

"It is a good thing we shall not have to send for the key," continued she, "for the gardener told me there have been workmen employed in the church, and it is therefore open to-day."

Still the usually talkative Squire made no observation, and they walked on, and left the grounds and came to the church path. At the gate he left her, and, promising to deliver her message to Mrs Lonsdale, turned slowly back again.

CHAPTER XIV.

"She sought her place to meditate and weep,
Then to her mind was all the past display'd
That faithful memory brings to sorrow's aid."

CRABBE.

THE church tower of Mountjoy was a peculiarly pretty object, surrounded as it was by trees of different growth and varied tint; yet all blending together so as to produce that harmony of outline and colouring so pleasing to the eye of the artist, or the simple, untaught lover of nature. Eleanor stood still, and paused where Mr Hollowdean had left her; for every separate tree which met her eye was like a well-remembered friend, the cheerful hues of the variegated sycamore, the light branches of the graceful birch, the sombre

green of the sober ilex, and the rich deep tints of the purple beech, each had its memories, and recalled the bright fancies, and the deeper thoughts of childhood in its fairy-land, and of opening youth with its vague longings and its undimmed ideal future ; now the past seemed but food for vain regret, the present full of trial, and the future dark and cheerless. She was wearied in' body and in feeling, and these were unwise and morbid thoughts that arose in her heart, and she should have checked them, but still they did arise, and she checked them not ; and they weighed her down as sorrow always will ; when, like unfaithful soldiers, as we too often are "in the world's wide field of battle," we sink down before the foe, against whose power we have ever at hand armour fitted to make us more than conquerors. How familiar looked the very gate, the gravel path, now badly kept, along which she had so often walked with a father of whom she had been so proud, who had been so

proud of her. The church felt gratefully cool, and she went through it to the chancel, to the spot of all others upon earth the most sacred to her, her father's grave. She had always visited it when at Carstone; and had ever returned from it with a strengthened spirit and a stronger hope. How would it be now? She remembered the fond love of that lost father, the judicious mind, the clear, bright intellect, the tender heart, and the strong, supporting arm. What would they not have been to her now? what priceless treasures, never, never to be recalled, had been taken from her! Where were his anticipations for his one loved child, who in his partial eyes was worthy of all that any poor fallen child of earth could hope for? Her exaggerated feelings, which had been on the rack through all that trying, tedious, maddening day, now gained the mastery, and she sank down in a convulsive agony of weeping, with her head resting against the rails that surrounded the flat tomb-stone.

Thus she remained for some time, overcome by that storm of emotion, whose power is so little suspected, and yet is often so strongly felt by natures which in the sight of the world may show a calm bearing and a temperate self-control. When such moods are allowed to come they will usurp a tyrannical mastery, and produce distorted views and extremes of feeling which in other hours might be deemed impossible. When we wake from them we know how weak we are, and we rise up and go forth to despise no one and to feel for all.

All alone as she supposed herself to be, Eleanor was startled by feeling a strong arm gently thrown around her, and endeavouring to raise her. Its services were not needed; she started from her kneeling attitude and sprang to her feet in an instant, her dark eyes flashing fire, with the quick intuitive pride which resented intrusion at such a moment. Time had not been given for the calm which falls upon the conquered spirit when the storm has spent

its force, and therefore she was in no mood for interference, or even for sympathy. The intruder stepped back, in his turn astonished, and the indignant eyes rested on the form of a young man of strange and slightly foreign appearance, with a bronzed complexion and a profusion of dark brown hair worn in no particular fashion, but hanging about his head in wild and picturesque disorder. His figure, which was tall and well proportioned, looked very striking in the natural attitude into which he had thrown himself, with the chest expanded, and the right foot, in advance of the other, set very firmly on the ground ; but there was a roughness about its moulding giving the impression of a finely-shaped but unfinished statue, which has not yet received the last delicate touches of the sculptor's chisel. The dress showed that, so far from being a matter of study, it was scarcely one of ordinary care to its wearer. What most attracted Eleanor's attention were the eyes, which were bright, full,

and expressive, and they were returning the gaze of her own with one as fixed and decided, though it spoke a different language, being as gentle and deprecating as hers was disturbed and haughty.

"Forgive me," said the intruder, in the humbled tone that might have suited a penitent child; "I see I have done wrong, as I often do without meaning it."

Eleanor bowed her head, and her look changed to one of distant politeness, meant to express that she was satisfied with his apology, and that he was at liberty to depart.

"But that is not enough, you must speak to me, and say that my ill-judged intrusion is pardoned; I was so grieved to see that your sorrow is not yet healed, as I hoped it might have been; I could not bear to see you suffer, I thought in fact that you were ill. But what is the matter, Miss Stuart, am I making my case worse instead of better?" For Eleanor was looking at him in surprise, and with the troubled ex-

pression with which we try to remember some half-forgotten thing. "Who are you?"

"An evil omen," he answered gloomily, as he passed his hand across his brow. "I return, and my best friend, my good angel, has forgotten me."

"Oh, forgive me," she exclaimed with eagerness, "I know you now; forgive me, Allan, and accept my sincerest welcome to your home."

She extended her hand, and he gave it that earnest friendly pressure which comes direct from a warm and honest heart.

A few of those hasty, unconnected observations were made which often follow a sudden recognition, and then, when the flush of surprise and pleasure had faded from Eleanor's cheek, her companion noticed how pale and wearied she looked. "Sit down there," he said, pointing to a place which might serve for a seat, at the feet of an old recumbent statue of a Knight Templar, in a recess of the chancel. "You are tired, and can rest there,

if you will spare me a few minutes ; you made yourself very comfortable on that seat once a long time ago—when you taught me to rub brasses with heel-ball, and waited so patiently till I was satisfied with what I did.”

Eleanor smiled faintly, and sat down in that well-remembered place. How strange and like a dream it seemed to her to be seated there, the gleams of sunlight penetrating as of old through the branches of the beech-trees which shaded the large eastern window, and shedding a checkered light here and there upon the chancel floor ; and that tall manly figure opposite to her was the poor, rough, neglected boy Allan, now transformed from the mortified dependent into the master of all, in a place where the lord of the manor was looked up to with a feeling approaching to the veneration of feudal times. The gloomy look had returned, and he was standing silently before her, with the contracted brow which showed that some dark thought had arisen

within him, for which there was no apparent cause, for his last words had been cheerful.

"I am glad," said Eleanor gently, "that you have come to your home so soon, to restore to the place the blessing of a resident landlord. What a field you have for carrying out those noble ideas that used at times to enter your mind."

"Noble ideas!" answered Sir Allan, with bitterness. "When had I noble ideas, when could I have them? From any but you, Eleanor! I should take those words as mockery."

"But they were noble, for they embraced the good of others."

"Ah, I remember. Your father used to say that you had great imagination, and that you pictured people to yourself more as they ought to be than as they really were."

"Enough," said Eleanor, with something like her old smile, "I see that in one respect you are unchanged. I will pay you no more compliments."

"Excuse me," he returned, in an altered tone, "and bear with me as you used to do, for every feeling within me has been ruffled and embittered by the effort required to make me visit this place."

A look of pain was on Eleanor's face, and she gave no reply.

"You are mistaken in thinking I am come to reside here," continued he. "I could not do it, I could not bear it, at least not for a long time. I shall see that everything is attended to, but I shall not be here. I have not even entered the Castle, to give orders to servants who used to give orders to me! You know the life I led, none better, and you may blame me, as I dare say you do, but you can't wonder at me. I was made to hate the place; I was made unequal to the duties which have now fallen upon me; my steward could fulfil them better than I. An inheritance like this, for which a man has not been educated, is a curse and not a blessing."

He spoke in bitter and strong excitement, as if it were a relief to give out the thoughts of his heart in all their naked truth.

“ Do not, do not talk in this way. A position in which Providence places us is *always* intended for a blessing : it is our own miserable doing if it is turned into a curse.”

“ It is like you to remind me of this. I know that what you say is true, but somehow to-day I cannot feel it.”

“ But you will come to feel it, I am sure you will. You will not suffer that germ of good, which no power of circumstances could destroy, to be unfruitful now, when everything combines to favour its growth.”

“ That combination has come too late.”

“ No decree of that unerring wisdom which metes to every man his *time* as well as his place can be too late. No expression can be more deeply sad than that ‘ too late,’ when it refers to the consequences of our own crimes, or follies, or shortcomings ; but when we use

it in speaking of that over which we could have no control, we are worse than unwise, We are faithless."

Sir Allan Mountjoy stood before her in silence for a while, with his arms folded and his eyes gloomily bent upon the pavement.

"You are unchanged," he said, at length, "you are just the same as you ever were."

"But I cannot say so of you. You used to be glad of every consoling thought, ready for any happy conviction."

"Because I was then a boy, and could have been moulded. I am now a man, and I cannot."

Eleanor was silent in her turn, and her memory went back to the old days of neglect and cruel wrong, and when next she spoke, it was not as before with energy and vehemence, but in a voice soft, low, and pleading. "Nobler than the noblest thing that the fondest care could have made you, will you be now, if you rise above everything, making yourself equal

to the present, ever advancing for the future, and, that your course may be blessed, oh, Allan, *forgiving the past.*"

"Angel! now as you ever were!"

Eleanor bent her head; at some times nothing can humble us more than the too warm appreciation of another. "It is getting late," said she, as she rose, "and my friends will be soon expecting me."

"I will escort you towards them, though not to them."

"Why not?"

"Because I am in no mood for strangers. You are the only person whose presence I could have endured."

Eleanor involuntarily smiled.

"I beg your pardon, you are the only person whose presence could be welcome to me to-day; any other would be unbearable."

"Then, feeling as you do, why did you come at all?"

“ Follow me, and I will show you.” And he led the way with rapid strides to the other end of the church, and entered a transept, whose walls from time immemorial had been set apart to receive the monuments of the proud Mountjoy race, and there, amidst pompous memorials, with their banners and escutcheons, and scrolls telling of lofty deeds, and filled with elaborate flatteries, Allan stopped before a simple tablet of the purest white marble, and Eleanor, standing by his side, read, inscribed upon it, merely the names and ages of his parents, with the dates of their early deaths. Underneath were the words :

“ Where the weary are at rest.”

For a space they stood there, and not a word was said, and then as silently they turned away.

When they reached the porch, Allan said in a low, subdued voice, “ Another monument will shortly follow to the memory of the

latest dead, and that will be an object of interest to many, but this was cared for by myself alone."

Before Eleanor had time to reply, voices were heard near the church gate.

"They are coming for you," said Allan Mountjoy, hastily and nervously; "good-bye." And quickly but warmly pressing her hand, he went back into the church.

"We are rather tired of walking," said Mrs Lonsdale, meeting her between the porch and the gate, "and so we thought we would come for you, instead of waiting for you to come to us. But bless me, child, you should not upset yourself by going into such melancholy places, you had much better have come with us."

"You should not, indeed," said Henry Mordaunt, kindly and rather anxiously; "you are quite fatigued. Will you take an arm?"

"No, thank you, I have been resting and sitting down for some time."

Flora pouted, and tried to refuse the arm when offered to her, but at last accepted it; and they walked on to the mill, where Mr Hollowdean had appointed to meet them with the carriages. He was there before them, and appeared in a very testy humour, for he was scolding his groom, and impatiently altering the harness. Jem was standing by, and taking hard words very quietly, for he knew that his good-natured master's temper would soon take a more favourable turn.

"Good evening, good evening," said the Squire, hastily, when he had unceremoniously handed Mrs Lonsdale into the carriage, and shut out a great piece of her flounce in closing the door. And then jumping into his gig, and barely giving Jem time to follow, he gave his impatient horse the rein, and was soon rattling along the road.

"Really that man grows rougher than ever," exclaimed Mrs Lonsdale, looking ruefully at the mark on her dress, when Henry Mordaunt had politely extricated it.

"Yes, mamma," replied Flora, "rougher and rougher every day."

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